

Results of FOI request regarding Phase 2 Of Parks Canada's Project to Eradicate Deer on Sidney Island (SIERP)

Background

As soon as Parks Canada established its Park on the northern end of Sidney Island it has put forward the idea of eradicating all deer on the Island for ecological reasons. The Park makes up about 20% of the land mass of the Island. The remaining 80% is privately owned by the Sallas Strata Corporation.

The Strata's land is made up of 110 fee simple lots along the coastline. Common land is in the middle of the Island and is jointly owned by members of the Strata. It is forested.

Fifteen years ago, Sidney Islanders agreed that the deer, especially the so called "invasive" fallow deer needed to be managed. There are also some native black tail deer, but for eradication purposes it is necessary to kill them as well.

To cut a long story short over the next 15 years thousands of deer were culled until by 2023 there were estimated to be 200 deer left.

The result was a significant improvement in the restoration of the ecology.

But this was not enough for Park Canada. They insisted on total eradication. Again, to cut a long story short, there were years of debate, including much misinformation (fallow deer spread Covid and were an existential threat), and lengthy litigation regarding the voting threshold required to approve an eradication. Strata Council set the threshold at 75%. That vote failed, leading to a claim by 6 owners that the threshold should be lowered to 50%. The CRT decided that a 50% threshold was adequate, and a second vote was held. Of the Sidney Islanders who voted a tiny majority approved an eradication. But a majority of owners, through abstentions and non-voting, did not provide their support.

This was enough for Parks Canada, in spite of their continuous commitment not to proceed without “social license.” That social licence does not exist on Sidney Island, nor does it exist in the broader community.

The results of an FOI request:

After Phase 1, which took place in the middle of December, 2023, using helicopter and night hunting, an FOI request was made for information regarding Phase 2. This phase will use netting, bailing dogs (chase and corner), with the possibility of Sentinel animals, corralling, and drop netting (these last three opposed by BCSPCA)

Three thousand documents were provided.

Here is a summary of the major points: (All page numbers refer to the FOI documents in the citation provided at the end of this article)

1) First Nations Reconciliation (Page 41,45 briefing note to Vice President Operations)

“Eradication is required as the work enables FN’s to fulfill their “Rights and Responsibilities to care for ecosystems in their traditional territories””

“Continuing is the best way to uphold their Rights and Responsibility to these lands and share their culture and language associated with land stewardship, hunting and harvesting and as the best way to ensure recovery of forest ecosystems on Sidney Island”

Please note, Parks Canada apparently believes these rights do not end at the park boundary. Sidney Island is described as part of FN's traditional territory.

There is no discussion of the fact 80% of Sidney Island is PRIVATELY OWNED. Both Canada and BC have consistently told the public that private property is off the table. The truth is unless a court orders that aboriginal rights exist on private property or unless the private property owners come to a mutual arrangement with regard to the use of private land, FN's have no rights over the private land on Sidney Island and Parks Canada should not be saying they do. Further, the Access License agreement that allows Parks Canada to come on to Strata Corp land does NOT mention reconciliation once.

Sidney Islander have been discussing this matter for 15 years on the basis that ecology is the primary mover, it is now clear that Reconciliation with First Nations, supported by Parks Canada is a "Primary Consideration:"

Is Parks Canada, as an agent of the Crown, going rogue?

2) Project Complexity and Risk Assessment. (page 650)

The Project Complexity and Risk Assessment document is required by the Treasury Board Secretariat before it will release funds. The project was greenlighted because this document was approved (pages 650-660)

The document consistently advises that there is a "large degree of public support by Sidney Islanders" (item 41), that there is a community support through the DIA process (item 16), that it meets the Federal Government priorities of *Reconciliation*, the

two billion tree initiative, and the halting and reversing nature loss by 2030.

There is no recognition regarding the closeness of the March 2023 vote. There is no recognition that the Strata Corp land is private property. There is no recognition that the Government of Canada has consistently claimed the issue of aboriginal rights over **private property is off the table**

It should be noted that Reconciliation was never mentioned by Parks Canada as a primary or priority reason for eradicating deer.

3) Results of Detailed Impact Assessment (DIA) (pages 305-312)

Many Community consultations were carried out by Parks Canada, the most important and thorough being the Detailed Impact Assessment. The results of the DIA are found on pages 305-312. It would not be an overstatement to say there was near universal condemnation of SIERP.

But since the criteria used was “tell us what damage SIERP will cause to the ecology” the results were ignored. Needless to say this points out the hypocrisy of PC’ s insistence this project has ‘Community support” and social license.

4) Work Contract Between Coastal Conservation and Parks Canada (March 22, 2022, page 451)

This describes the detailed arrangement between Parks Canada and Coastal Conservation. No wonder this project now has a 12 million \$ price tag. The operational details are complex. But what is interesting is the amount of uncertainty.

Coastal Conservation is required to do a risk assessment regarding the likely success or failure of the project depending on how many owners do not allow access (page 462).

Unfortunately, we do not have a copy of that assessment because the FOI request was made before it was done. We have now made that request.

Coastal Conservation must ensure they are able to use drop netting, Sentinel animals (also known as Judas animals), baiting stations and helicopters,

Baiting dogs, as opposed to scent dogs, must be available. These dogs will actively pursue and corner deer (page 836)

The use of Sentinel animals is universally considered unethical, including by our own BCSPCA (Hugh Warwick, *Cull of the Wild: Killing for the sake of Conservation 2024, London*

There are numerous documents indicating a clear concern whether the project can succeed given the number of private landowners who will not provide access.

5) Concern regarding protests.

“Known agitators” are being “monitored”, Law enforcement is ready to respond, and a DOJ litigator has been assigned to challenge any legal action.

“Known agitators” includes owners living on Sidney Island. (Page 643) This is a perfect example of Parks Canada’s garden variety bully culture. To call private citizens who have legitimate concerns regarding their property rights and who are concerned about

animal cruelty, “agitators” who require “monitoring”, dishonours the federal public service.

6) Monitoring the hunt.

Cam Stevenson head of the ‘Kiwi field crew’ from New Zealand (it seems no one from Canada can do this) advises that NO ONE will be allowed to observe or monitor the hunt including the BCSPCA (page 801)

Parks Canada must monitor the netting to fulfill its contractual obligations under the Access Licence. There are approximately 35 kilometers of fencing required for this project. That is the same distance from downtown Victoria to the Ferry Terminal at Schwartz Bay. Parks Canada lacks the personnel to fulfill its contractual obligations

7) Budget.

The first budget suggested by Parks Canada was set in 2013 at \$800.000. When Sidney Island voted on this project in March,2023, the budget was set at \$5.9 million. Islanders were advised there would be no increase in that budget and voted accordingly.

The Budget is now at \$12.8 million and will climb further. (page 646)

How about another vote Parks Canada?