

# Group pushes for more provincial RV parks

By Chad Ingram  
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B.C.'s RV Park Working Group is determined to see the number of RV parks in the province increase.

The joint government/industry task force submitted a report to the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts last week containing 15 recommendations on how to maintain expand and increase the number of RV parks in B.C.

According to information from the B.C. Lodging and Campgrounds Association (BCLCA), 74 RV parks in the province have closed or changed their land use in the last three years.

This represents a 10 per cent decrease in overnight accommodations throughout the province, the BCLCA said.

"With a lot of the parks, because of the costs, for a lot of the owners it makes more sense to sell to developers," said Chris Bower in an April 18 telephone interview.

A member of the RV Park Working Group, Bower is also president of the BCLCA and man-

ager of the Nk'Mip RV park.

"We aren't trying to tell people how to do their business," Bower said.

"It's a lot about making it easier for people who want to develop RV parks."

The 39-page report's recommendations include making Crown land more viable and available for RV purposes, improving current parks to accommodate new, larger RVs and providing better access to funding for park operators.

"It also looks at how to set up parks on and off First Nations land," Bower said. "RV parks can provide huge economic benefits for First Nations bands."

Bower said that B.C.'s Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts, Stan Hagen, visited the Nk'Mip park in the fall of 2007.

"When Stan Hagen visited the RV park he'd seen what was possible and the types of tourists we had coming," he said. "The province really didn't understand the industry or the shape it's in."

The Nk'Mip park currently has 326 sites, 100 of which are available for winter camping. Bower said he's hoping to expand the

park by another 81 sites.

"Units are getting larger and people are staying at parks longer as a result of gas prices," he said.

While in years past the average stay for an RV camper was maybe a night or two, Bower said that number has now increased to four or five nights.

Through the summer months, the Nk'Mip park is often packed to capacity.

According to ICBC, the number of RVs on the province's roads is expected to increase by 30 per cent.

Bower remains optimistic the province will be able to create the necessary accommodations.

"There's a lot of room," Bower said. "In the next 10 years, if 100 parks were completed (it would be good.)"

He said these parks would need to contain at least 200 sites each and said that ideally, 20 of them would be located in the Okanagan Valley.

Bower said the next phase in the process will be working with the government to put together an action plan.

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