

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN SUMMARY

TATSHENSHINI-ALSEK PROVINCIAL WILDERNESS PARK (CANADA)

(Extension to existing Kluane/Wrangell/St. Elias/Glacier Bay Site)

Summary prepared by IUCN/WCMC (March 1994) based on the original nomination submitted by the Government of Canada. This original and all documents presented in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the Committee.

1. LOCATION

Lies in the extreme northwestern corner of British Columbia, and is wedged between the Yukon Territory to the north and the Alaska Panhandle to the west and south. Connects the Glacier Bay and Kluane/Wrangell/St. Elias World Heritage site.

2. JURIDICAL DATA

Established in September 1993 under the provisions of the B.C. Park Act. The park is administered by the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, although the area is subject to a land claim by the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations.

3. IDENTIFICATION

Size is 958,000ha of almost undisturbed wilderness. The park forms an important link between Wrangell-St Elias National Park and Preserve, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, Alaska, and Kluane National Park Reserve, Yukon, all of which have World Heritage status. The park contains: Mount Fairweather, which at 4,663 meters, represents the highest point in British Columbia; the largest non-polar ice-cap in the world; over 350 valley glaciers; and an estimated 31 surge-type glaciers. The Tatshenshini-Elsek rivers and their wide U-shaped valleys are prominent natural features.

The park contains 45 of the 600 rare vascular plant species found in British Columbia, including Alaska Nagoon berry, Fragile sedge and Wedge-leaved primrose. The diversity of vegetation in the region has resulted in the occurrence of large predators and ungulates, rated as nationally significant. These include the "Blue" or "Glacier" bear, thought to be a colour phase of the black bear and found nowhere else in British Columbia or Canada, and considered rare in Alaska. The area is also acknowledged to be one of the last stronghold's of North America's grizzly bear population. The park provides an important travel route for water fowl, with at least 40 bird species known to use the region. These include trumpeter swan and peregrine falcon, both considered vulnerable in Canada. About 80 northern interior mammal and bird species also occur.

As the wide valleys of the Tatshenshini and Elsek rivers pass through the St Elias mountains, they represent the only vegetated, low elevation and ice-free linkage for the migration of plant and animal species in the entire region. The Tatshenshini-Elsek river system contributes 95% of the chinook salmon, 90% of the sockeye salmon and 75% of the coho salmon for the commercial fishery in the Dry Bay area of the Gulf of Alaska.

4. STATE OF PRESERVATION / CONSERVATION

The relatively inaccessible wilderness lands of Tatshenshini-Alsek will be managed to conserve, in perpetuity, natural diversity and cultural values, and provide outstanding opportunities for backcountry recreation, wildlife viewing, scientific research and education. As a Class A Provincial Park, all commercial resource exploitation is prohibited except that which enhances the area's natural values. Settlements, roads, and any activities incompatible with wilderness preservation are also prohibited.

Apart from the Haines Highway corridor which occupies less than 5% of the area, the entire park will be zoned and managed for wilderness preservation. A Master Plan is to be developed for the park through open consultation with the public; in the meantime, an interim management plan will be prepared to provide management direction for park management zones, visitor use, recreation and conservation goals. Aboriginal rights and interests that exist in British Columbia for land and resource use are respected in protected areas. Aboriginal people have a legal right to use protected areas for traditional sustenance activities (including hunting, fishing and gathering) and for ceremonial and spiritual practices, subject to conservation objectives.

Despite there being 171 mineral claims which predate park designation, no further mineral activity will be permitted. Any necessary reclamation of exploration workings will take place upon resolution of the compensation issue and in accordance with the interim management plan.

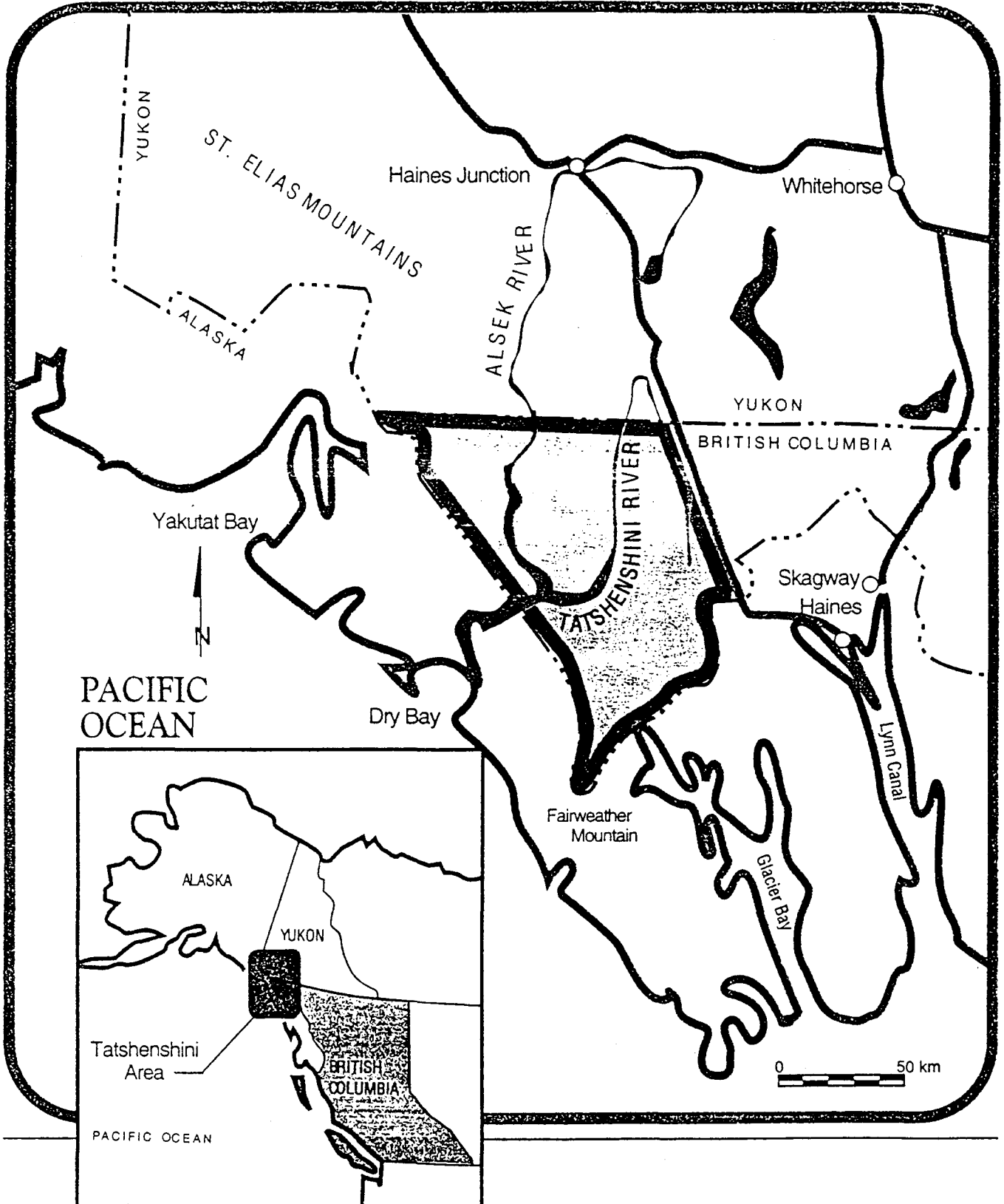
With the growing interest in rafting, proper management and regulation are required to ensure that the values being protected are not damaged from overuse. In recent years, the Tatshenshini has experienced a 200% growth in tourism use.

5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

The Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Wilderness Park nomination, as prepared by the Government of Canada, provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage natural property:

- (ii) **Outstanding example of earth's evolutionary history** The area is the most seismically active in North America, and is dominated by the St Elias mountains, including Mount Fairweather, the highest point in British Columbia. Mount Fairweather is one of the most spectacular natural features in a wilderness full of outstanding examples of geological and geomorphological processes.
- (iii) **Contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty** The Tatshenshini-Alsek rivers form a link between the existing World Heritage site in the Yukon and Alaska, resulting in a continuum of glacial activity and post-glacial ecological succession. The region contains the largest non-polar ice-cap in the world, over 350 valley glaciers, and about 31 surge-type glaciers.
- (iv) **Contain the most important and significant natural habitats for threatened species** As an extension of the existing World Heritage site, the area will become one of the only sites in the world where perpetuation of a genetically viable population of grizzly bear is possible. The rivers also form a corridor for the migration of plant and animal species throughout the region. The area is home to the 'Glacier bear', includes 45 of the 600 rare vascular plant species in British Columbia, and about 200 of the known 400 Dall's sheep in the province have their summer and winter ranges in this area.

Tatshenshini-Alsek Wilderness Park



WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION
TATSHENSHINI-ALSEK PROVINCIAL WILDERNESS PARK (CANADA)

(Extension to existing Kluane/Wrangell/St. Elias/Glacier Bay Site)

1. DOCUMENTATION

- i) IUCN/WCMC Data Sheet (11 references)
- ii) Additional Literature Consulted: Champagne-Aishihik Band. 1988. From Trail to Highway . 45 p.
- iii) Consultations: Four external reviewers. BC Parks, USNPS and Parks Canada officials, Champagne-Aishihik council members.
- iv) Field visit: July, 1992; May, 1994. Jim Thorsell

2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

The Tatshenshini/Alsek (T/A) park is physically a component of the St.Elias Mountain Parks site and thus comparisons should be made on the total unit. This has been done in the 1992 evaluation of Glacier Bay National Park which noted similar glaciated mountain and coastal fiord sites in south-west New Zealand and in southern Chile's Bernardo O'Higgins/San Rafael National Park. All of these have similar climatic conditions and contain high mountains, waterfalls, icefields, offshore islands and diverse high-latitude wildlife. On a regional scale the T/A has some similarities to the Stikine River/Spatsizi Provincial Park found 300 km to the south. The T/A, however, is an integral component of a natural continuum that extends from the Pacific Ocean, up over the coast mountains and down into the Yukon Territory.

In sum, the qualities that distinguish T/A and the associated Alaska/Yukon World Heritage site are:

- the breadth of the display of active natural processes (tectonic, volcanic, glacial, fluvial, aeolian, mass wasting, soil formation, plant succession, animal migration);
- the combination of spectacular marine, coastal, wild river, and high mountain scenery;
- the diversity and abundance of habitat for wildlife and fisheries (resident and migratory, marine and terrestrial);
- the minimal extent of human modification, paucity of permanent human settlement, and pristine wilderness qualities; and
- the quality and amount of research that has been conducted on both sides of the border.

3. INTEGRITY

Apart from subsistence fishing and hunting in the upper reaches of the T/A by the Champagne-Aishihik First Nations, the area is entirely protected from any consumptive use by Class A Provincial

Wilderness Park status. Mining claims which existed in the area prior to its official establishment in 1993 will be extinguished. The major threat from the proposed open pit mine at Windy Craggy has been removed as the Government of British Columbia opted to give the area park status. Some restoration work needs to be done to remove evidence of mining exploration activity but over 95% of the total area of the park is wilderness.

There are some recreational use pressures from rafters and kayakers along the river but these are being managed by the park services involved. The T/A is only one year old and the planning for its management is just commenced. Only two staff are based in the park on a seasonal basis but this may be sufficient at this point in time. Finally, the T/A part of the St.Elias unit has been less intensively studied than the other components but it is expected that the management plan will identify the areas of research that need attention.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Although the entire T/A park is under the jurisdiction of the B.C. government, there is a land claim being made over the full Tatshenshini/Alsek area by the Champagne-Aishihik band. This is a separate issue from the nomination itself and it is recognized that any decision by the World Heritage Committee will not jeopardize the land claim in any way.

Related to this claim will be subsequent involvement of the First Nations in the management of the area possibly within a similar framework that has been structured for Champagne-Aishihik involvement in Kluane National Park under their Yukon land claim. Apart from their direct role in on-site management activities, they will also be part of a proposed International Advisory Body which would prepare an accord on the whole site and act as a coordinating group.

The Committee should also be aware that discussions on an additional extension to the site have been initiated with the USFS. The area concerned is a portion of the Tongass/Russell Fiord Wilderness area which would provide continuity between Wrangell/Glacier Bay and the T/A. This would be a significant addition but action on its inclusion is still under consideration by the American authorities.

5. EVALUATION

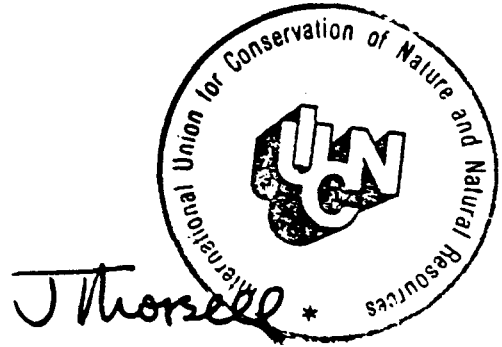
The decision against the Windy-Craggy mine in favour of a provincial wilderness park was a major achievement for conservation of the St.Elias region. The T/A park protects the vital "missing link" in the whole St.Elias parks unit. The recent IUCN General Assembly resolution on the issue summarizes the international response and is attached to this evaluation.

The addition of the T/A not only increases the size of the site by 10% but now will allow (and, in fact, even require) an international advisory body to be established. This should then lead to an ecosystem management approach for the whole unit which will further ensure integrity.

The natural criteria applicable for the T/A are consistent with those on which the original Kluane/Wrangell St.Elias area was inscribed in 1979 (ie. *ii*, *iii* and *iv*). The T/A also meets these same three and fulfills all conditions of integrity. With the incremental growth in the size of this property, however, an overall "heritage statement" for the entire unit should be prepared by the advisory body and provided to the Committee in due course.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Tatshenshini/Aisek Wilderness Park should be added to the World Heritage List as part of the existing Canadian/USA transfrontier site of Wrangell/St.Elias/Glacier Bay. A new, less cumbersome name for the property (for instance St.Elias Mountain Parks) should be requested from the authorities along with an updated 'heritage statement' for the full 10 million hectares area. The Committee may also wish to (1) underline the understanding that any decision made by the Committee will not prejudice the Champagne-Aishihik land claim over the area; (2) complement the government agencies involved in moving towards an International Advisory Council; and (3) endorse, in principle, IUCN Resolution 19.75 dealing with protection of the area (attached).



19.75 Tatshenshini-Aisek River System, Canada and USA

RECALLING the Recommendation 18.46 of the 18th Session of the General Assembly, drawing international attention to the magnificence and the unique wilderness character of the Tatshenshini-Aisek watershed;

RECALLING that this Recommendation also noted the great danger of degradation and destruction to the pristine wilderness and wildlife values of this outstanding portion of the earth from a huge open-pit mine with accompanying corridors for transmitting the mineral ore;

RECOGNIZING that the Premier of British Columbia has just established a Class I Wilderness Park for the entire one million hectares of the Tatshenshini-Aisek watershed in British Columbia;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING that the Government of Canada, with the agreement of the Province of British Columbia, has nominated the Tatshenshini and Aisek rivers as a World Heritage Site;

AWARE that, together with the existing wilderness of the St Elias-Wrangell National Park and Preserve and Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve in Alaska, and the Kluane National Park in Canada, this will be the largest international wilderness area in the world;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING that the Government of British Columbia and the Champagne-Aishihik First Nations have indicated their intention to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding regarding their cooperation in the future management of this area;

The General Assembly of IUCN - The World Conservation Union, at its 19th Session in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 17-26 January 1994:

CONGRATULATES the Government of British Columbia, and particularly Premier Michael Harcourt, on his vision in establishing this extraordinary Class I Wilderness Park and looks forward with pleasure to the consideration by the World Heritage Committee of the Tatshenshini-Aisek as a possible World Heritage Site.