**Bill 4 Passes: B.C. Parks Now Officially Open…To Pipelines and Drilling**

By [Carol Linnitt](http://desmog.ca/user/6165) • Tuesday, March 25, 2014 - 13:13



A little-known Bill, the [*Park Amendment Act*](http://www.leg.bc.ca/40th2nd/1st_read/gov04-1.htm), that will drastically alter the management of [B.C. parks](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/)is set to become law today, creating controversy among the province’s most prominent environmental and conservation organizations. The passage of [Bill 4](http://www.leg.bc.ca/40th2nd/1st_read/gov04-1.htm) will make way for industrial incursions into provincial parklands including energy extraction, construction of pipelines and industry-led research.

The Bill, quietly introduced in mid-February, has already met significant resistance in B.C. where the Minister of Environment received “thousands of letters” of opposition, according to Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society’s Peter Wood. “There has been absolutely zero public consultation, and the pace at which this was pushed through suggests this was never a consideration,” he said in a press release.

“This Bill undermines the very definition of what a ‘park’ is,” Gwen Barlee from the Wilderness Committee said in the same statement, “given that our protected areas will now be open to industrial activity.”

“This is a black day for B.C. Parks – the provincial government is ensuring that none of our parks are now safe from industrial development,” she said.

According to staff lawyer Andrew Gage with the West Coast Environmental Law the bill is “difficult to square” with the sentiments underlying the B.C. Parks Service, which claims provincial parks and conservancies are a “public trust” for the “protection of natural environments for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public.”

In an [overview piece](http://wcel.org/resources/environmental-law-alert/park-amendment-bill-paves-way-industrial-exploration), Gage wrote “Bill 4 allows for industry (and others) to carry out ‘research’ in provincial parks related to pipelines, transmission lines, roads and other industrial activities that might require park land. It also reduces legal protection for smaller parks.”

He noted that preliminary ‘research’ carried out by mining company Taseko in preparation for an environmental assessment of the controversial Prosperity Mine included the drilling of 59 test pits, eight drill holes 50 to 75 metres in depth, and ten holes roughly 250 metres in depth to collect metallurgical samples. The tests also required the creation of 23.5 kilometres of exploratory trails.

Bill 4 claims permits for ‘research’ will only be considered after a “thorough review of protected area values,” yet, Gage writes, “this requirement is nowhere to be found in Bill 4.”

This amounts to a “’trust, us, we’re government’ approach,” writes Gage.

Previously park use permits were only granted to those able to demonstrate the proposed activity was “necessary for the preservation or maintenance of the recreational values of the park involved.” Bill 4 rids the *Park Act* of this safeguard.

“The government has sent a clear signal that it is open to having pipelines cut through our globally renowned protected areas,” said Al Martin of the B.C. Wildlife Federation. “The *Act* will now allow industrial expansion in some of B.C.’s most beloved parks, placing them at risk.”

Critics are also concerned the changes will open pristine landscapes to environmentally destructive oil and gas extraction processes.

“This legislation opens the door to pipelines, oil and gas drilling and industrial activities that are counter to the values that created our parks system,” said Darryl Walker from the B.C. Government and Service Employees’ Union. “If Bill 4 passes, 2014 will be the year that B.C. Parks changed forever,” he said.

[Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society](http://org.salsalabs.com/o/2463/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=15093) and a group of other environmental NGOs have already collected nearly 10,000 signatures and letters in an [effort to stop](http://org.salsalabs.com/o/2463/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=15093) the implementation of the bill.

These groups are claiming the total lack of public consultation left local communities, park users and conservation groups out of the decision making process.