

Wild Times: Dream Parks

A group of park dreamers in the Kootenays are working to include Argenta-Johnsons Landing Face in the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy

Joe Foy

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Help expand the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy Provincial Park and Protected Area to include a wild area known as the Argenta-Johnsons Landing Face.

For well over a century people have been adding wildlands to BC's federal and provincial parks system. BC's parks are now famous in Canada and some of the best in the world. Yet they are still very much a work in progress, and not without flaws.

Just about every BC park has come from a dream. It takes a special type of person to dream the future and then get others to buy into their vision of a place where wildlife has room to thrive and where ancient cultures maintain a connection to landscapes that house creation stories. I have been blessed to have met a number of park dreamers.

Chief Ruby Dunstan is a park dreamer whose words and determined actions to protect the Stein River Valley from logging in the 1980s resulted in the designation of the Stein Valley Nlaka'pamux Heritage Provincial Park in 1995.

Chief Dunstan's clear vision of the relationship between nature and Indigenous cultures still rings true today as a compelling argument for enshrining First Nations' authority to designate and manage park lands in BC. A huge flaw in BC's current system is that First Nations' management authority is not in place for all parks. That has to change.

Gwen Barlee was my colleague at the Wilderness Committee for almost two decades. Sadly, Gwen passed away after a year-long fight with cancer in 2017. She was an extraordinary park dreamer, whose ideas shape my thinking today. Gwen, who grew up in the Okanagan, had seen firsthand that many kinds of wildlife are disappearing because not enough habitat has been protected.

BC's park system is too small. In too many cases, low elevation habitats have been excluded from parks because of lobbying by commercial interests. Gwen had been working on the proposed South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Reserve, which will provide strong protection for the habitats of the many species at risk in this part of the province – a dream that many others share.

Read more: [Wild Times: Phantom Forests](#)

Carolyn Schramm and Gary Diers are park dreamers who live near the village of Argenta, on the shore of Kootenay Lake. They see the need to expand the fabulous Purcell Wilderness Conservancy Provincial Park and Protected Area, by including a wild area known as the Argenta-Johnsons Landing Face.

The Argenta Face encompasses 6,200 hectares of forests and mountain slopes rising up to the peak of Mount Willet, which overlooks beautiful Kootenay Lake. Carolyn and Gary and many others are calling on the BC government to add the Argenta Face to the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy. This has to happen fast because a logging company wants to start mowing down the forest there, and that would be a crying shame. The Argenta Face has low elevation forested habitats, which are much too rare in the BC Parks system.

Want to help fend off the logging and get the Argenta Face the protection it deserves? Of course you do! Visit the [Willet Wilderness Forever](#) to write a letter to our BC government leaders. Make this park dream come true now!

Joe Foy is the co-executive director for the [Wilderness Committee](#), Canada's largest membership-based wilderness preservation organization.

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