



Access to Backcountry Restored

VICTORIA – Several Motor Vehicle Closures established for environmental protection after the 2021 wildfires have been repealed.

Due to severe wildfire damage in areas of the Thompson Okanagan and one area in the Kootenays, 15 motor-vehicle closures under the Motor Vehicle Prohibition Regulation of the Wildlife Act were put into effect in the fall of 2021. After a review of fire severity, degree of recovery, and restoration activities in these areas, the Province has deemed that these closures can be reduced, and in some cases, removed.

Seven road closures have been rescinded entirely: Nk'Mip, Momich Lake, Two Mile Road, Bunting Road, Hunakwa Lake/Crazy Creek Gorge, Mowhokam Creek, and Garrison Lake, all located within the Thompson-Okanagan region.

In addition to these changes, six of the remaining motor vehicle prohibited areas are being modified to increase public access while still protecting environmental values: Sparks Lake, Tremont Creek, Thomas Creek, Lytton Creek/George Road, July Mountain, and McKay Creek. Motor vehicles will be permitted within these prohibited areas provided they stay on existing roads and trails; off road vehicle use in these areas will still be prohibited. Of note, there are additional restrictions within the Sparks Lake and Tremont Creek motor vehicle prohibited areas under 1,000m elevation.

The White Rock Lake motor vehicle prohibited area has decreased in size, but all other restrictions are being maintained. The White Rock Lake fire was large and intense and still requires focused management for rehabilitation.

Area closures that remain are intended to be in place while recovery efforts are planned and initiated. It is unknown how long the closures will remain in effect.

Maps of the area, including downloadable georeferenced maps, are available at: www.gov.bc.ca/motorvehicleprohibitions

A backgrounder follows.

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Frequently asked questions

Why were these motorized-vehicle restrictions put in place?

- Communities and forests were severely affected by the 2021 wildfire season, with more than 550,000 hectares of habitat in the Thompson Okanagan region burnt.
- The 2021 wildfires and fire suppression activities (e.g., creation of approximately 2,900 kilometres of fire guards) have opened areas that were previously difficult to access.
- High road and fire guard densities, improved sightlines for hunters and predators across burned landscapes, and concentration of animals into remnant habitats are likely to increase vulnerability of wildlife populations.
- Unauthorized public access can have negative effects on sensitive burned ecosystems, including increased soil compaction, increased spread of invasive species, and accelerated erosion of wildfire-charred soils, which impacts aquatic ecosystems and fish habitat.

How does the Province assess an area as ‘recovered’?

- When relaxing access restrictions, each area is evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- The Province uses a variety of criteria to determine whether an area is sufficiently recovered.
- Two primary considerations are
 - The regrowth of vegetation, thereby reducing the potential for soil erosion and providing refuge for wildlife.
 - And that safety concerns, such as dangerous trees in recreation sites, have been mitigated.

What types of vehicles are included in this prohibition?

- The motor vehicle closure applies to all motorized vehicles, including automobiles, trucks, motorcycles, motorhomes, electric bikes, snowmobiles, and all types of wheeled or tracked off-road recreational vehicles.

Why are you giving more access to the backcountry? Will this not further threaten wildlife?

- The motor vehicle closures were put in place to promote the recovery of areas damaged by the 2021 wildfire season. This recovery has reached a level where road access can resume.
- Wildlife health is always a primary goal when adjusting regulations and was a major consideration for reopening some roads.

Why haven't all motor vehicle closures been rescinded?

- Several of the areas that were originally part of the Motorized Vehicle Prohibition Regulation have sufficiently recovered to allow for motorized access, allowing for recreational activities in the backcountry to resume.
- Meanwhile some areas require further recovery and restoration efforts and so road access remains prohibited.
- Each area is unique and has to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Can people hunt or recreate within the areas still under motor-vehicle closure?

- Hunting is permitted within motor-vehicle closure areas.
- Motor-vehicle closures can be accessed by non-motorized means (e.g., on foot, horseback, or bicycle) for any recreational purpose.

Are there any exceptions to the current motor-vehicle prohibitions?

- The order does not apply to commercial activities other than hunting.
- Commercial activities are exempted as there are existing regulations or conditions that can be added to authorizations that mitigate the potential for negative impacts.

Are there permits available to access a closure area using a motor vehicle?

- People may apply for an exemption to access a motor vehicle closure area through FrontCounter BC at: <https://portal.nrs.gov.bc.ca/>

For the roads still under prohibition, will closures still be enforced?

- Yes, enforcement patrols will increase to enhance compliance and enforcement of these prohibitions. Outreach may be supported in partnership with First Nations Guardian patrols.

More Information on the motor-vehicle closure and maps can be found:

- at: www.gov.bc.ca/motorvehicleprohibitions
- on the Provincial Hunting and Trapping Regulations Synopsis Corrections and Updates website at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/sports-culture/recreation/fishing-hunting/hunting/regulations-synopsis/regulation-synopsis-corrections-and-updates>
- by emailing regional resource management: FishAndWildlife@gov.bc.ca