
Fort Babine Lodge Tourism Management Plan

Lake Babine First Nation

March 6, 2018



Background

1.1 Project Overview

This management plan is provided to enable the Province of BC to issue appropriate replacement tenures for the lands and foreshore described under this plan as an interim step in the transfer of these Crown Lands to Lake Babine Nation as part of a negotiated land settlement process.

The Lake Babine Nation is taking over the ownership and management of the existing Fort Babine Lodge assets and commercial operations and therefore requires a legal right to complete work on this site until the lands are formally transferred to LBN ownership. The LBN plan includes the refurbishment and improvement of the facilities to create a sustainable tourism operation that will benefit the LBN, and, the community members of Fort Babine.

The previous Fort Babine Lodge management approach has unfortunately resulted in neglect of the property and the associated preventative maintenance activities. At best the past operations barely covered its expenses and the infrastructure has been allowed to deteriorate. Significant work is required to restore it to allow it to command a mid-industry price point and meet the expectations of prospective guests.

It is expected that the 2018 season will be used to complete the proposed works with a plan to market and re-open the facility for the 2019 season.

1.2 Authorizations, Permits or Approvals

The authorizations, permits and approvals required until the subject lands are transferred to LBN are as follows:

- Adventure Tourism Tenure (Intensive Use License of Occupation or Lease) – to cover the lands and facilities currently operated as Fort Babine Lodge described below and allow for control of public access to the site for guest safety and security purposes.
- Foreshore Lease for swimming area, existing docks and boat launch for areas fronting the lands described below.
- Water use permit to continue drawing water from Babine Lake.

1.3 First Nations

This application is made by the Lake Babine Nation in the core of their territory. No additional referrals are required.

Location

1.4 General Description

Fort Babine Lodge is located at the northwestern end of Babine Lake at the entrance to the world famous “Rainbow Alley” fishing area on the Babine River. The Lodge is located on leased land on the opposite shore to the Fort Babine Indian Reserve. The lot is a 12.42-hectare (30.68 acre) lakefront site. The property fronts the Nilkitkwa Forest Service Road to the southwest. The topography is terraced, with benches of land that slope downward towards the lake from west to east.

1.5 Legal Description

File Number 6402533 (Block A of District Lot 7023; Main Lodge); File Number 0271132 (District Lot 6992); and File Number 6402543 (District Lot 7022).

1.6 Location Justification

This section is not applicable due to Fort Babine Lodge already being located on the site.

1.7 Seasonal Expectations of Use

LBN expects the following booking characteristics and occupancy once the refurbishment of the facility is complete and Fort Babine Lodge is open for business in 2019:

Booking Characteristics

The peak season has been defined as July 1 to September 10 annually. Off-peak season includes May 1 to June 30 and September 11 to October 31. The current proposed season is 184 days (May 1 - October 31).

Projected Occupancy

Lodge

The projected occupancy and growth projections for the lodge are as follows:

- Cabins peak season: 50% occupancy year one, growing 10% per year to 90% occupancy in year 5;
- Cabins off-peak season: 50% occupancy year one, growing 5% per year to 70% occupancy in year 5;
- All campsites: 40% occupancy year one, growing 5% per year to 60% occupancy in year 5;
- Boat rentals peak season: 50% occupancy year one, growing 5% per year to 70% occupancy in year 5; and
- Boat rentals off-peak season: 30% occupancy year one, growing 5% per year to 50% occupancy in year 5.

Restaurant

The projected sales and growth projections for the restaurant are as follows:

- Peak season average meal sales at 24 meals per day year one, growing by 10% per year for two years and then 5% per year;
- Off-peak season average meal sales at 12 meals per day year one, growing by 5% per year; and
- Projections also assume that one-third of sales are to a la carte visitors and Fort Babine residents.

2.0 Infrastructure

2.1 New Facilities or Infrastructure

Existing Infrastructure

The lodge infrastructure is located on the lower terraces of the property. In the northwesterly corner, there is a large log building and on the middle portion of the property, there are eight cabins arranged in two rows of four. The upper terrace features ten recreational vehicle sites. Lot 7022 includes 940 sq. metres of foreshore that includes an area for two small boat docks.

The large main building appears to have been built around 1992 and is of log construction. The majority of the exterior walls are logs and vertical siding is used on the gable ends of the building. The roof is made of pre-finished metal. The cabin's main floor includes an entrance foyer, living room, dining area, kitchen, small bedroom, bathroom and a small storage room. The upper floor includes three small bedrooms and a $\frac{3}{4}$ bathroom. There is a deck that runs the full length of the front of the building. The total building area is 1,869 sq. ft.

Each of the eight cabins is essentially identical and the initial few cabins were built around 1992 with the remainder built over several years. They are also of log construction and sit on low concrete perimeter foundations that were added in 2001. The roofs are also of pre-finished metal. There is a small deck with a railing on the front of each cabin. The interior of the cabins have an open living room, kitchen and dining area with a small bedroom and $\frac{3}{4}$ bathroom on the main floor. A low-ceiling loft, accessed by a ladder from the main floor, provides an additional sleeping area above the bedroom and bathroom. The main floor of each cabin totals 405 sq. ft.

Upgrade Strategy

The overall strategy for Fort Babine Lodge is to take the current infrastructure and refurbish it so that the lodge provides mid-priced accommodation, rental fishing boats, fishing license sales, a waterfront with rental canoes, kayaks and paddleboards, an isolated and safe swimming area, and a fire pit with surrounding Adirondack chairs. The RV park will

be cleaned up with new log RV stalls as well as another shared area with a fire pit with a view of the lake. Landscaping and general clean-up of the site and overgrown areas is also required.

The main lodge building will be refurbished, and a 2000 square foot addition completed to create a restaurant and meeting area. Some of the cabins will be moved so that all cabins have a water view. All cabins will have an addition completed so that they each have a screened porch, bedroom, and bathroom.

The reconfiguration of the Fort Babine Lodge site will also result in a change to the water access and adjustments to the road access. LBN will formally request the removal of the right-of-way through the property to the water to allow this work to take place and eliminate the open public road access through the developed area for guest safety and security concerns. LBN will ensure that there is continued boat launch access for the public for a fee to cover maintenance expenses.

2.2 Access

Fort Babine Lodge is currently accessed by floatplane, boat or by the Nilkitkwa Forest Service Road that runs north from Smithers Landing.

Access to Smithers Landing/Fort Babine from Highway 16 is from Eckman Road, about 5 km east of Smithers on the right (east). Turn here and follow for 53 km. (Note: The road eventually turns into Babine Lake Road). Turn left (north) onto the Nilkitkwa Forest Service Road, and follow for 44 km, to the turnoff to Fort Babine on the right (east).

2.3 Utilities Requirements and Sources

Hydro and a hardline telephone cable run into the property. The main cabin is heated with electric baseboards and a wood stove while the guest cabins are heated with baseboards only.

2.4 Water Supply

The water supply is taken from Babine Lake, flows into a settling well and is then pumped up to the main and eight cabins. This water is not treated to be potable and is used solely for washing, toilets and showers. All drinking water is bottled and must be brought into the property. The potential to provide a three-stage water filtration system for the lake water will be explored.

2.5 Waste Collection, Treatment and Disposal

Water and sewage disposal occurs on site via a septic tank and septic field which were upgraded approximately 10 years ago.

The project will be managed in a manner that will minimize the amount of construction-generated waste. Where disposal of waste is necessary, such activities will be conducted in accordance with all applicable regulations.

3.0 Environmental

3.1 Land Impacts

3.1.1 Vegetation Removal

Vegetation removal will be limited to maintenance activities, including brushing, danger tree removal, and removal of invasive species if found. Vegetation will be composted or burned, depending on its size and type.

3.1.2 Soil Disturbance

Prior to any disturbance activities, any suspected contaminated sites will be investigated and documented. Contaminated sites will be managed in accordance with all applicable regulations.

3.1.3 Riparian Encroachment

A substantial portion of the foreshore has already been modified for recreational use by the previous owner and guests. LBN will develop an appropriate boat launch and guest beach area which will reduce the current riparian encroachment and allow for natural processes to re-establish in the current dispersed use areas.

3.1.4 Pesticides and Herbicides

LBN does not plan to use any general pesticides or herbicides in their operations and maintenance activities. Limited specific-use pesticides may be used as prescribed for control of mice, rats and other vermin species in and around the facilities as required.

3.1.5 Visual Impacts

There is no expectation of negative visual impacts under this application. It is expected that the refurbishment and clean-up of the site will improve the viewscape from both land and water perspectives.

3.1.6 Archaeological Sites

There is no expectation of finding an archaeological site or artifact since the site has been significantly disturbed over many years. However, if a site or artifact is found LBN will follow their own protocols regarding archaeological chance finds.

3.1.7 Construction Methods/Materials

Best practices construction methods and materials will be used. Since the Fort Babine Lodge is road accessible LBN will be able to use standard trucking options to deliver materials and construction crews to the site.

The road network also will permit removal of debris to approved waste management facilities as required.

If any works are contemplated that may result in possible sedimentation transport to Babine Lake, LBN will employ silt fencing, settlement ponds and other control measures to ensure that no sediment transport takes place.

3.2 Atmospheric Impacts

3.2.1 Sound, Odor, Gas or Fuel Emissions

There will be no sound, odor or fuel emission impacts to fish, wildlife or surrounding residents during operation of Fort Babine Lodge. There may be limited construction noise that can be detected across the lake during the refurbishment activities. These activities will only take place during normal daylight work hours.

3.3 Restrictions on Tenuring of Aquatic Lands

3.3.1 Drainage Effect

The project will not affect surrounding drainage. In fact, changes to the road access will reduce the potential sedimentation transport into Babine Lake.

3.3.2 Public Access

The current public access is limited to those people who are using the Fort Babine Lodge facilities already as the public does not believe that the area is open to the public. A lease or intensive use license of occupation is required to control public access for the safety and security of our guests and facilities.

3.3.3 Flood Potential

The project intended use will not increase or change any risks of flooding. No permanent facilities will be located in the flood zone of the lake.

3.4 Fish and Wildlife Habitat

3.4.1 Disturbance to Wildlife or Wildlife Habitat

Review of the provincial public databases regarding habitat and species at risk indicate that there are no specific species or habitat concerns in the application

area that would be affected by the existing or proposed commercial tourism operations. LBN will incorporate the *Wildlife Guidelines for Backcountry Tourism/Commercial Recreation in British Columbia, May 2006* as part of their operating standards.

4.0 Socio-Community

4.1 Land Use

There is no expectation of overlapping tenure issues on this specific intensive use site due to the number of years that the facility has been operational. In addition, it is expected that the Province will eliminate any potential tenure issues prior to transfer of the land to LBN ownership.

4.1.1 Land Management Plans and Regional Growth Strategies

The Bulkley Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) was approved in 1998. It directs the management of 760,000 hectares of Crown land in northwestern B.C. and reflects the direction established by the Bulkley Valley Community Resources Board and a team of government representatives in consultation with First Nations and local government.

The direction was developed around the central concepts of biodiversity and sustainability, with the intent to provide management direction that would ensure the health of the communities, the resources and all natural systems within the area. In addition to biodiversity, many other values were assessed, including those for timber, fisheries, water quality, wildlife, agriculture, range, outdoor recreation, tourism, and subsurface resources.

Fort Babine Lodge current and proposed operations are within the guidelines identified in the Bulkley LRMP.

Fort Babine Lodge also falls within the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District. A review of the regional district bylaws and discussion with the planning department confirmed that the lodge falls outside of building permit and inspection boundaries and that any development must simply comply with BC Building Code standards. Discussions also confirmed that the current and proposed uses are in compliance with those approved for the area.

4.2 Socio-Community Conditions

4.2.1 Adjacent Users or Communities

Award of the proposed tenures for Fort Babine Lodge will not affect public access for adjacent land owners or tenure holders.

4.2.2 Existing Services

There will be no increase in demands on existing public services as a result of this tenure award. In fact, an increased staff presence at the Fort Babine Lodge may improve the potential for emergency services, particularly with first aid or fire control.