

Part 12 – Descriptions of Proposed Electoral Boundaries

Columbia
al Boundaries Commission

East Kootenay
cial Electoral Areas (1999)
ulation Dot Density (2005)
Dot Equals 100 Persons

Prepared by BC STATS



Part 12 – Descriptions of Proposed Electoral Boundaries

Electoral boundaries commissions in British Columbia traditionally supplemented their written reports with printed maps of their proposed electoral districts and with detailed written descriptions of the boundaries of each proposed district.

The maps typically included street names, municipal or regional district boundaries, or highways, rivers or lakes that formed boundaries. For most people, such maps were adequate to identify the proposed electoral district in which they voted and the general outline of each district.

For greater certainty and precision, commissions also included written descriptions, which typically made refer-

ence to roads, municipal boundaries, segments of regional district boundaries, and rivers and lakes. When a proposed electoral boundary did not follow a road, waterway or administrative boundary, a commission had to resort to technical legal language, known as metes and bounds descriptions.

If a commission's proposed electoral districts are adopted by the Legislative Assembly, they are brought into force

through passage of an *Electoral Districts Act*, which typically includes a written description of the boundary for each district, using a legal metes and bounds description that is often much more detailed and technical than the commission's description. For example, the *Electoral Districts Act* that implemented the 1999 Wood Commission's proposals⁷⁰ fills nearly 80 pages. The metes and bounds description of the Yale-Lillooet electoral district required five

⁷⁰ *Electoral Districts Act*, SBC 1999, c. 31, Schedule 2.

pages of single-spaced type, beginning as follows:

The Yale–Lillooet Electoral District is all that portion of the Province of British Columbia contained within the following boundaries:

- Commencing at the southwest corner of District Lot 23 (S.), Similkameen Division of Yale Land District, being a point on the southerly boundary of the Province of British Columbia;
- thence northerly along the westerly boundary of said District Lot 23 (S) to the northwest corner thereof;
- thence northerly in a straight line to the southeast corner of District Lot 177, Similkameen Division of Yale Land District;
- thence northerly along the easterly boundary of said District Lot 177 to the northeast corner thereof;
- thence northerly along the westerly boundary of District Lot 353, Similkameen Division of Yale Land District to the northwest corner thereof;
- thence westerly along the southerly boundary of District Lot 354, Similkameen Division of Yale Land District to the southwest corner thereof;
- thence northerly along the westerly boundaries of said District Lot 354 and District Lot 260, Similkameen Division of Yale Land District to the northwest corner thereof;
- thence westerly along the northerly boundary of District Lot 261, Similkameen Division of Yale Land District to the southeast corner of District Lot 809 (S), Similkameen Division of Yale Land District;
- thence northerly along the easterly boundaries of said District Lot 809 (S)

and District Lot 1898, Similkameen Division of Yale Land District to the northeast corner thereof;

These metes and bounds descriptions are expensive and time-consuming to prepare, requiring the services of professional surveyors. While they offer precision, they are incomprehensible to the average person.

Our goal is to provide boundary descriptions that:

- are informative to readers (*i.e.* “what electoral district am I in?”);
- give candidates, political parties and election officials sufficient detail for their purposes; and,
- meet legal requirements and that can be easily incorporated into legislation, if the Legislative Assembly adopts our proposals.

With recent advances in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) digital mapping technology, we have been able to produce maps that start with essential geographical features such as rivers and lakes, heights of land, highways, roads and railway lines, which we can then overlay with numerous political and administrative areas, including:

- current electoral districts;
- federal electoral districts;
- first nations reserves;
- municipalities;
- regional districts and electoral areas within them;

- school districts;
- local health areas;
- forest management districts; and,
- national and provincial parks.

As we developed our proposals for electoral districts, we were able to overlay our proposed boundaries on these other natural and administrative markers. Using Google Earth™ as an aid, we could even zoom in on a specific geographical area to see whether a proposed boundary would unintentionally divide a group of people, small community or new subdivision.

We have been able to incorporate much of this new GIS digital mapping technology into the DVD which accompanies this report. The DVD holds the GIS data necessary to depict a map of each electoral district, as well as a map of the whole province, with its natural features, roads, and political and administrative boundaries, to allow the electoral boundaries to be viewed in context. The DVD also holds the GIS software required to read the geo-reference data and to allow a viewer, by zooming in, to view the data at any display scale between 1:20,000 and 1:7,500,000.

We are satisfied that the combination of maps contained within the body of this report and the digital version of maps contained in the accompanying DVD make the traditional metes and bounds description of proposed electoral boundaries unnecessary.

In addition to the printed maps and the DVD's visual depiction of our proposed boundaries, there are approximately 100,000 coordinates of latitude and longitude which, when joined together, form the boundaries for our proposed electoral districts.

As far as we know, we are the first Canadian electoral boundaries commission to rely on GIS digital mapping technology to visually depict its proposed boundaries. Out of an abundance of caution we have provided the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly with, in addition to our printed report and DVD:

- printed sample copies of a few large maps of our proposed electoral boundaries; and,
- printed and digital copies of the coordinates of latitude and longitude that are joined to form the boundaries for the above large maps.

A complete set of maps and accompanying coordinates will be printed for all SMP and STV electoral districts.

It will, of course, be up to the Legislative Assembly to decide whether the GIS digital mapping technology we have used, and which we have incorporated into the accompanying DVD, meets necessary legal requirements and can replace the traditional metes and bounds descriptions found in the current *Electoral Districts Act*.⁷¹

⁷¹ There is some precedent for the legal recognition of boundaries, without reliance on a metes and bounds description: see the *Park Act*, RSBC 1966, c. 344, s. 7.1.