



2023 Budget Consultations FMCBC Written Submissions to Finance Committee

Introduction

The Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC (FMCBC) is a province-wide federation of 41 outdoor clubs.

Member clubs engage in non-motorized backcountry activities, such as hiking, rock climbing, mountaineering, backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking, trail running, kayaking and canoeing.

The FMCBC is dedicated to protecting and maintaining access to quality non-motorized backcountry recreation in BC's mountains and wilderness. Club members build and maintain trails for the benefit of the public.

Recommendation 1 - Increase funding and resources for BC Parks

Increase operational funding and resources for BC Parks to allow staff to proactively plan, develop and maintain trails, day-use sites and backcountry campsites, to address climate change and to support Indigenous, volunteer and public engagement.

Rationale for Recommendation 1

Recent increases to BC Parks' budget fail to address much-needed trail and facility repairs and staffing levels to respond to demands for more recreation opportunities (trails, day-use sites, backcountry campsites) and climate change, manage long neglected maintenance and engage Indigenous peoples, volunteers and visitors. Long-term funding will allow long-range planning, facility upgrades and repairs to backcountry trails and infrastructure and promote Indigenous reconciliation.

Expanding Recreation Opportunities: Many parks are without management plans to guide trail and campsite developments or have outdated plans which fail to reflect Indigenous history or interests. Example: In southwest BC, Pinecone Burke (planning initiated 2014), Mt Seymour (planning initiated 2020) or Callaghan (planning to start 2022) don't have management plans. Well-designed trails and campsites in these parks would expand recreation opportunities and alleviate pressures on Golden Ears, Garibaldi and Joffre Lakes that have access restrictions through day-use or vehicle passes. Many parks with winter recreation opportunities are closed in winter due to lack of funding.

Indigenous reconciliation: Park webpages and plans do not reflect the history and relationship of Indigenous peoples to parks. Resources to update them and facilitate Indigenous interpretative programs would promote understanding of Indigenous connections to the land.

Volunteers: Under-staffing makes collaboration on projects difficult. FMCBC proposed a partnership agreement for trail work in southwest BC. Due to limited staff capacity to work with volunteers, we still have no agreement. Also, BC Parks no longer publishes annual reports, limiting information on use of scarce resources.

Climate change: Climate disasters have destroyed access roads, trails and campgrounds, highlighting the need to plan, upgrade or relocate assets. Some campgrounds and picnic sites have been repaired but many trails remain closed.

Recommendation 2 – Increase funding and resources for RSTBC

Increase operational funding and resources for Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC) to allow staff to engage in long-range planning, development and maintenance of trails, day-use sites and campsites and respond to and approve applications for trail and site developments and maintenance.

Rationale for Recommendation 2

RSTBC manages outdoor recreation on crown land outside provincial parks. RSTBC works with rural and Indigenous communities and recreation organizations to develop, manage and promote a network of designated recreation sites (almost 2,000 legally established sites) and trails (almost 26,000 km of trails). However, thousands of trails and sites remain undesignated and unmanaged.

RSTBC has less than 60 staff and an annual operating budget of about \$8M to fulfill its mandate. Most districts have one Recreation Officer, who may be supported by one or two Recreation Technicians, to manage several hundred active sites and trails in their regions and to authorize construction or maintenance of recreation assets under volunteer partnership agreements.

RSTBC requires additional operational funding and staff to:

1. Manage and maintain recreation trails and facilities
2. Process applications to authorize partners to develop and maintain recreation sites and trails to meet public demand for quality outdoor recreation opportunities. Applications can consume hours of volunteer time and require Indigenous engagement and costly engineering, environmental or archaeological assessments. Applicants can wait months to learn if an authorization is approved or rejected, without any sense of where their applications are in the queue. Referrals can take years to process, leading to rogue trail construction or maintenance.
3. Engage in long-range planning to safeguard wildlife, environmental, cultural and recreational values. Example: Squamish River valley in the summer is inundated with thousands of overnight visitors, who camp along the river or any "flat" areas along the network of forest service roads. There are no outhouses, garbage facilities or food caches to service campers.
4. Support volunteer recreation clubs and organizations that work in partnership with RSTBC to construct, manage, repair and maintain trails and recreation sites to respond to the influx of outdoor users.

Recommendation 3 – Funding to repair and maintain access roads

Provide funding to repair and maintain access roads and infrastructure (i.e., bridges and culverts) to restore and maintain access to provincial parks, backcountry trailheads and recreation sites.

Rationale for Recommendation 3

The province is at a crossroads of aging infrastructure and with no funding or resources to allow RSTBC to maintain access to popular trailheads, recreation sites, terrain and even provincial parks with access roads outside park boundaries. The inability to maintain access roads means

- a. Loss of access to popular recreations sites and trails
- b. Access restricted to 4x4, high clearance vehicles, and
- c. Overcrowding of recreation trails and sites that remain accessible.

Examples:

1. Bobtail Mountain Trail, Bobtail Mountain Provincial Park, BC

The Gregg Creek Forest Service Road washed out in 2020 about 5 km from the trailhead. While the trail is mostly in the park, the access road is mostly outside the park boundary. Without funding to repair the road, the trail is mostly unused.

2. Walker Forest Service Road to Kakwa Provincial Park, BC

The Walker Forest Service Road provides access to Kakwa Provincial Park. It is closed at 37km due to unsafe road conditions. The road is only recommended for 4x4, high clearance vehicles and drivers familiar with their operation.

3. Ashlu Forest Service Road, Squamish, BC

The bridge, which spans Ashlu River at the 6 km mark, is unsafe and barricaded. The bridge provides access to the river and wilderness terrain used for mountaineering, hiking, ski touring, white water kayaking and mountain biking. With no resources for upgrades, the bridge is slated for removal in 2022.

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