



Greater Bragg Creek Trails Association (GBCTA) Response to Alberta Government News entitled “Optimizing Alberta Parks”

March 11, 2020

The following response has been approved by the GBCTA Board of Directors. The GBCTA was disappointed to learn that plans are underway to eliminate groomed cross country ski track setting in the Kananaskis Region at Peter Lougheed Park, Mt. Shark and Kananaskis Village Area. Along with the Canmore Nordic Centre, the GBCTA was named to provide groomed ski trails at West Bragg Creek in Kananaskis Country in the coming year. While this announcement re-affirms the strong working relationship the GBCTA has established with the Alberta government, it was made without proper consultation. Our organization feels that our perspective is of value considering our experiences in the realm of volunteer ski trail grooming. We would also like to share our recommendations and highlight the challenges associated with administering a complex, dynamic non-profit trail group operating on public lands and in the West Bragg Creek Provincial Recreation Area.

Recommendations:

1. The GBCTA recommends that the Alberta Government conduct meaningful public consultation with Albertans before the implementation of any plans announced in “Optimizing Alberta Parks”.
2. The GBCTA recommends that groomed cross country ski track setting by Alberta Parks staff continue in the Kananaskis Region at Peter Lougheed Park, Mt. Shark and Kananaskis Village Area. These cross country ski trails are very popular with Albertans and attract international tourists. The GBCTA does not believe it is feasible to have a not for profit group handle this work.
3. The GBCTA recommends that Alberta implement reasonably priced user fees to cover the costs of providing recreational services both in Alberta Parks and on public lands. Such user fees are common across Canada and the USA. Cross country skiers, for example, pay a user fee at the Canmore Nordic Centre. There are numerous options for recreational type user fees. The approach recommended by the GBCTA is a province wide vehicle access fee for all provincial land, whether in a Park or on public land. The fee could be daily, weekly or annually, with a variety of payment options including online or as part of the vehicle licence registration process. The GBCTA believes this is the most effective and efficient approach with

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the greatest ease for enforcement. The GBCTA recommendation is a broader fee than the proposed \$35 per off road vehicle fee proposed in the United Conservative Party platform.

4. The GBCTA recommends the funds collected from a new recreational user type fee be used to cover the costs of constructing and maintaining recreational infrastructure on provincial lands (examples include, but are not limited to; trails, parking lots, washrooms, picnic facilities, etc). This would include infrastructure operated by Alberta Parks, Public Lands or not for profit groups (examples include, but are not limited to; the GBCTA, Friends of Kananaskis, Moose Mountain Bike Trail Society, Calgary Mountain Bike Alliance, Great Divide Trails Association and Pembina Nordic Ski Club).

Background:

The GBCTA operates 165 km of recreational trails in the Bragg Creek area, both in WBC Kananaskis and in Rocky View County. We handle all aspects of trails from concept to reclamation, including the grooming and track setting of 60 km of ski trails and the snow grooming of 40 km all season trails for fat tire bikes at WBC. The GBCTA is a leading not for profit trail group in Alberta, having spent over \$4 million on Bragg Creek trails and contributed over 60,000 volunteer hours in the past 12 years. The success of the GBCTA can be attributed to many factors, including having a dedicated highly motivated core group of volunteers who live nearby. They are highly skilled and many are retired or semi-retired persons who are financially secure. We have also found that filling key grooming positions with paid employees to oversee operations and volunteers dramatically improves efficiency, work quality and accountability. Most importantly, this contributes to the overall safety of all field operations. Having a secure base of operations is also paramount to our success. To expect this model to be transferable to remote locations such as Mt. Shark or Peter Lougheed Park would not be feasible in our opinion.

The GBCTA is not sustainable from a financial or volunteer perspective, given our current funding and operating model. Current donation levels from trail users are insufficient to cover our operating, maintenance and grooming/tread setting budget.

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