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TRAILS STRATEGY REVIEW

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

BC MINISTRY OF FORESTS, LANDS, NATURAL RESOURCE OPERATIONS
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

British Columbia offers an unparalleled diversity of landscapes and endless opportunities for outdoor recreation. Trails are the fundamental means to explore and enjoy these spectacular and unique natural amenities, are integral to the landscape, and enable meaningful connections between people and nature.

Adopted in 2013, the Trails Strategy for B.C. is a call to action that invites all British Columbians to join in supporting and developing a sustainable network of trails throughout the province.

The Trails Strategy for B.C. is managed by the Provincial Trails Advisory Body (PTAB), a partnership between:

- Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (RSTBC);
- Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (BC Parks);
- Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture;
- Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure;
- Outdoor Recreation Council of BC;
- BC Wildlife Federation;
- Wilderness Tourism Association;
- BC Recreation and Parks Association;
- And six public representatives from the Outdoor Recreation Council's membership.

This strategy is a collaboration of provincial agencies, recreation organizations, local governments, land users, First Nations, and others from across the province. Guiding this collaborative undertaking are the following principles:

- Sound Environmental Stewardship and Management
- Respect and Recognition for First Nations' Interests
- Mutual Respect between Trail Interests and Other Resource Users
- Respect and Understanding among Diverse Trail Interests
- Partnerships and Collaboration
- Secure Recreation Opportunities for All Trail Users
- Benefits for Individuals, Communities and the Province

In 2019, the PTAB, together with Recreation Sites and Trails B.C., began a formal review of the Trails Strategy for B.C. to ensure its continued relevance and importance to

recreationists, communities, First Nations, tourism proponents and the province as a whole.

The formal review began with a detailed look at available academic literature and publications documenting the importance of trails to reconciliation, health, mental health, tourism and economic development. Following this, key stakeholders from the outdoor recreation sector and government were engaged through interviews and webinar focus groups. This information was used to develop a public engagement survey.



The survey launched January 13, 2020 and was open until February 28, 2020.

Concurrent to these phases, staff from the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development have been engaging directly with First Nations to discuss the Trails Strategy.

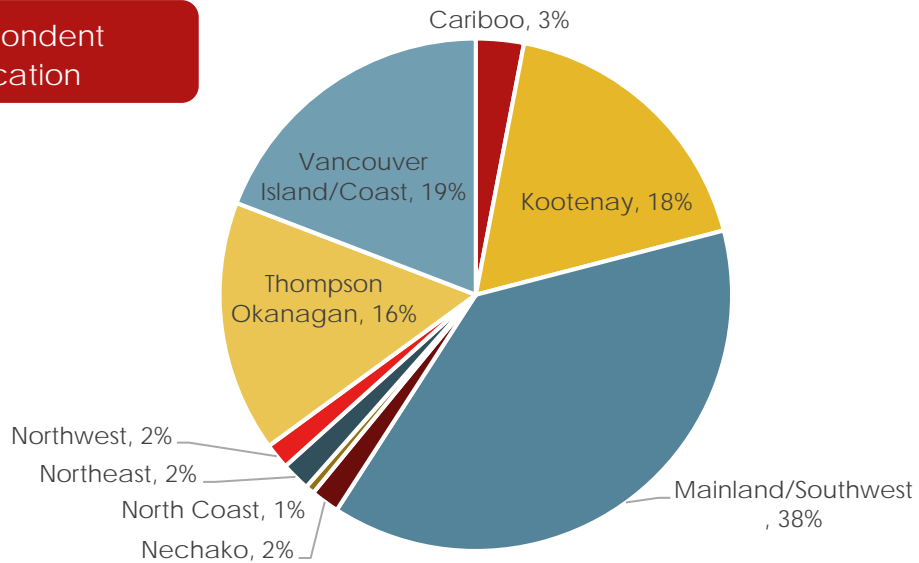
The following report outlines the finding of the public engagement survey.

Who did we hear from?

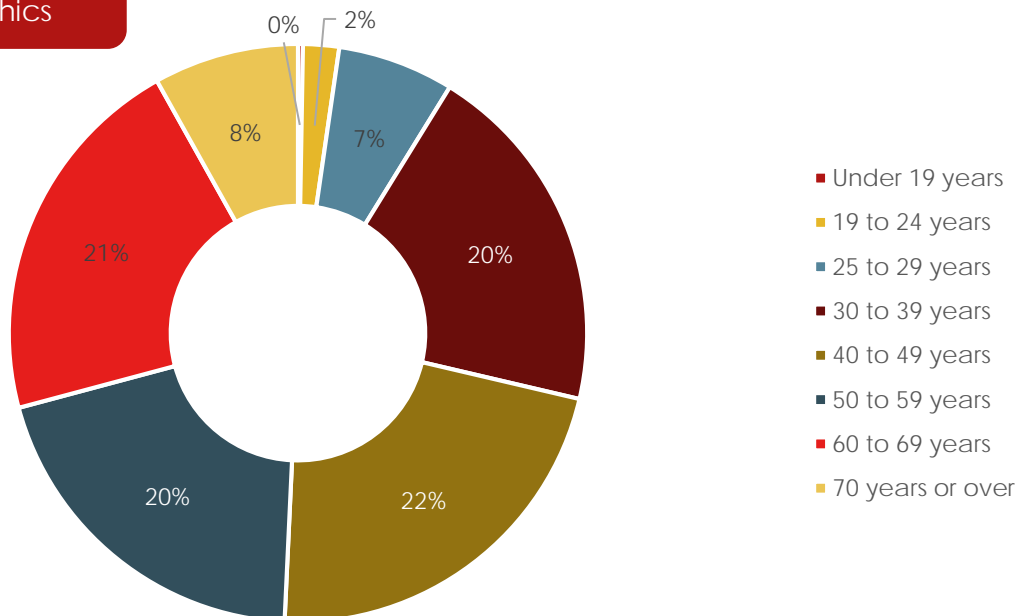
During the seven weeks that the survey was open, we received 5,921 responses to the survey.

We heard from British Columbians from across the province and across all age demographics.

Respondent Location



Age Demographics



Of all trail survey respondents, 55 percent were members of a trail club or association. The types of trail clubs or associations can be broken down into these groupings:

Club and Association Members

Type	Percentage
ATV	4%
Cycling	26%
Dirt Bike/ Off-Road Motorcycle	6%
Running	3%
Trail	11%
Hiking/Mountaineering/Alpine	7%
Horse/Equestrian	2%
Marine/Kayak/Canoe	1%
Outdoor	3%
Ski	3%
Snowmobile	4%
Wildlife	1%
4X4 Vehicles	10%
Naturalists	1%
Other	12%

We heard that many of those who responded have been involved in trail building and maintenance.

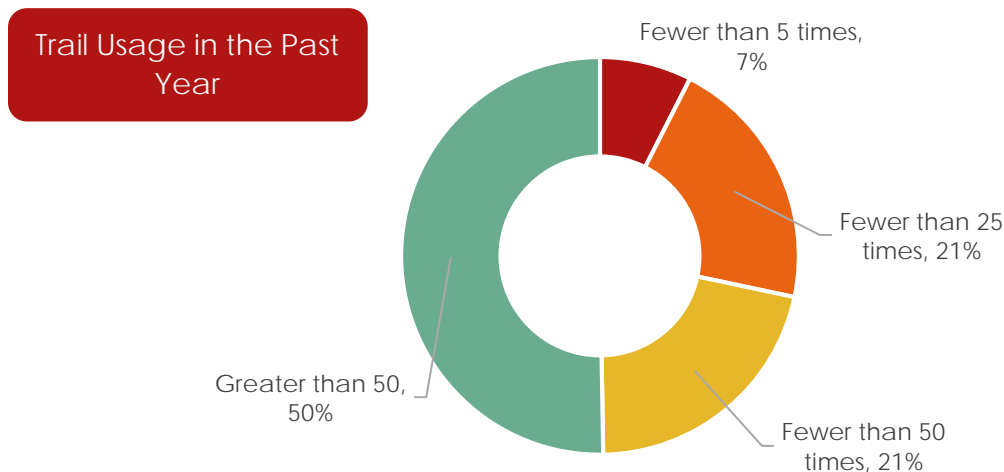
45% have taken part in trail building

67% have taken part in trail maintenance

How do people use trails in B.C.?

People from across the province take part in many types of trail activities. The most common responses include hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing, canoeing or kayaking, cross country/Nordic skiing, and trail running. While these activities were common across the province, certain regions also saw a high prevalence of ATV/quad riding, 4x4 driving, dirt biking/off-road motorcycling, and snowmobiling.

People also use trails often throughout the year. With 50% of respondents saying they used trails more than 50 times in the last year.



British Columbians use trails that are part of various trail systems, most commonly those managed by municipalities, BC Parks, regional districts and Recreation Sites and Trails B.C. (RSTBC). In some regions, a high prevalence of users stated that they use resource roads and trails on private land. People are also using trails both in their local area, and as part of their in-B.C. tourism activities.

Given that 55 percent of survey respondents are members of trail associations or clubs, it is not surprising that many of these individuals indicated that they go to related websites for information on trails. In addition, mobile apps along with the RSTBC and BC Parks websites are used to find information on trails. With regards to mobile apps, 65 percent of people use technology or applications to access maps and trail information.

We heard that people use trails for a variety of reasons with the top three being:

1. Social connections
2. Fitness
3. Pleasure



What do people think of the current Trails Strategy?

Overall, we found that most people agree with the vision of the Trails Strategy.

Vision: a world-renowned, sustainable network of trails, with opportunities for all, which provides benefits for trail users, communities and the province.

Respondents were particularly interested in the wording of the vision of the Trails Strategy. Specific areas of note regarding wording include:

World-renowned

- People believe the strategy should focus on meeting local needs and that “world-renowned” places too much emphasis on international tourism, which can lead to overcrowding of trails.
 - However, tourism is seen as being helpful, including for areas seeing an economic decline.
- Respondents also indicated that the current funding levels do not allow the trails to be “world-renowned”.

Opportunities for all

- People believe that opportunities should be provided for all, but they do not believe that every trail should be accessible to everyone.

Sustainable

- People believe the current wording is too vague.
- The vision should address sustainability in terms of protecting the natural environment.

Guiding Principles:

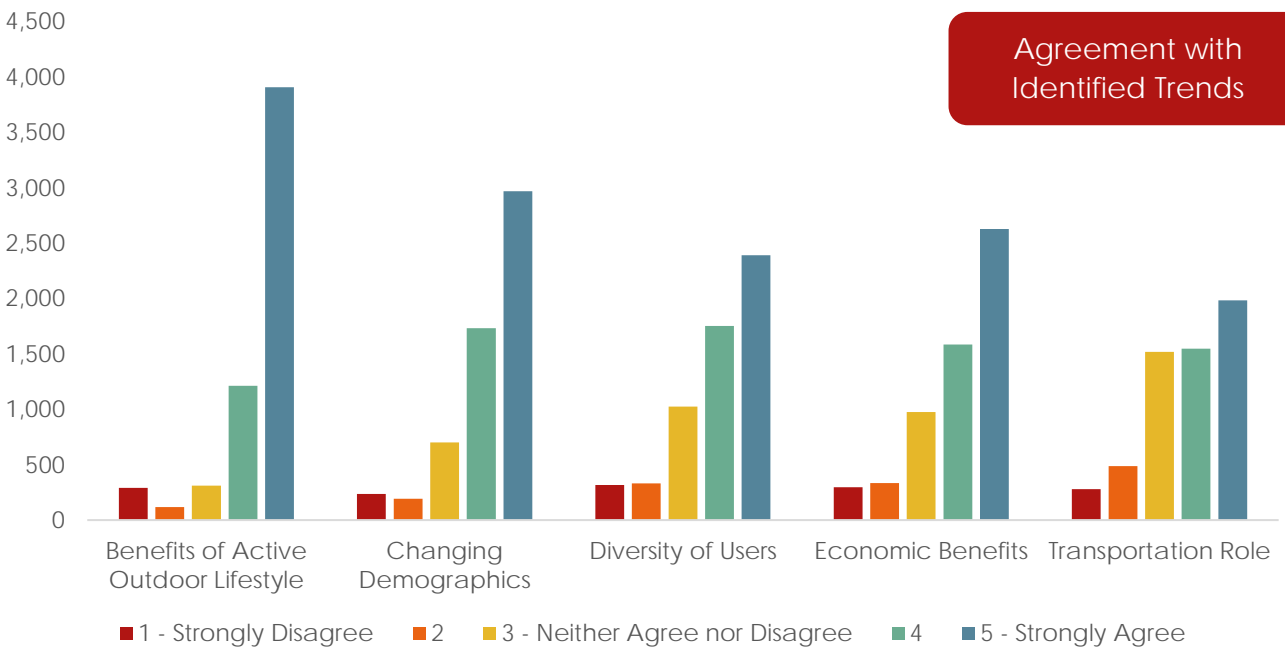
- Benefits for individuals, communities and the province
- Secure recreation opportunities for all trail users
- Partnerships and collaborations
- Respect and understanding among diverse trail interests
- Mutual respect between trail interests and other resource users
- Respect and recognition for First Nations' interests
- Sound environmental stewardship and management

While there was general support for all of the guiding principles, people raised that the wording is too vague and that there is overlap between the statements.

In addition, people would like to see more inclusion of the following topics in the Trails Strategy:

- Further emphasis on environmental stewardship and clear language regarding protection of sensitive ecosystems and wildlife.
- Improving access to trails (regarding resource roads).
- The development of single use trails to reduce conflicts.
- Financial support and sustainable funding for trail maintenance.

Generally, respondents agreed on the trends influencing trail usage.



People most strongly agreed with the benefits of an active outdoor lifestyle as a driver for increased trail usage. Other trends impacting trail usage in British Columbia that were identified include:



Loss of access due to the decommissioning of resource roads.

Increase in e-bike usage.



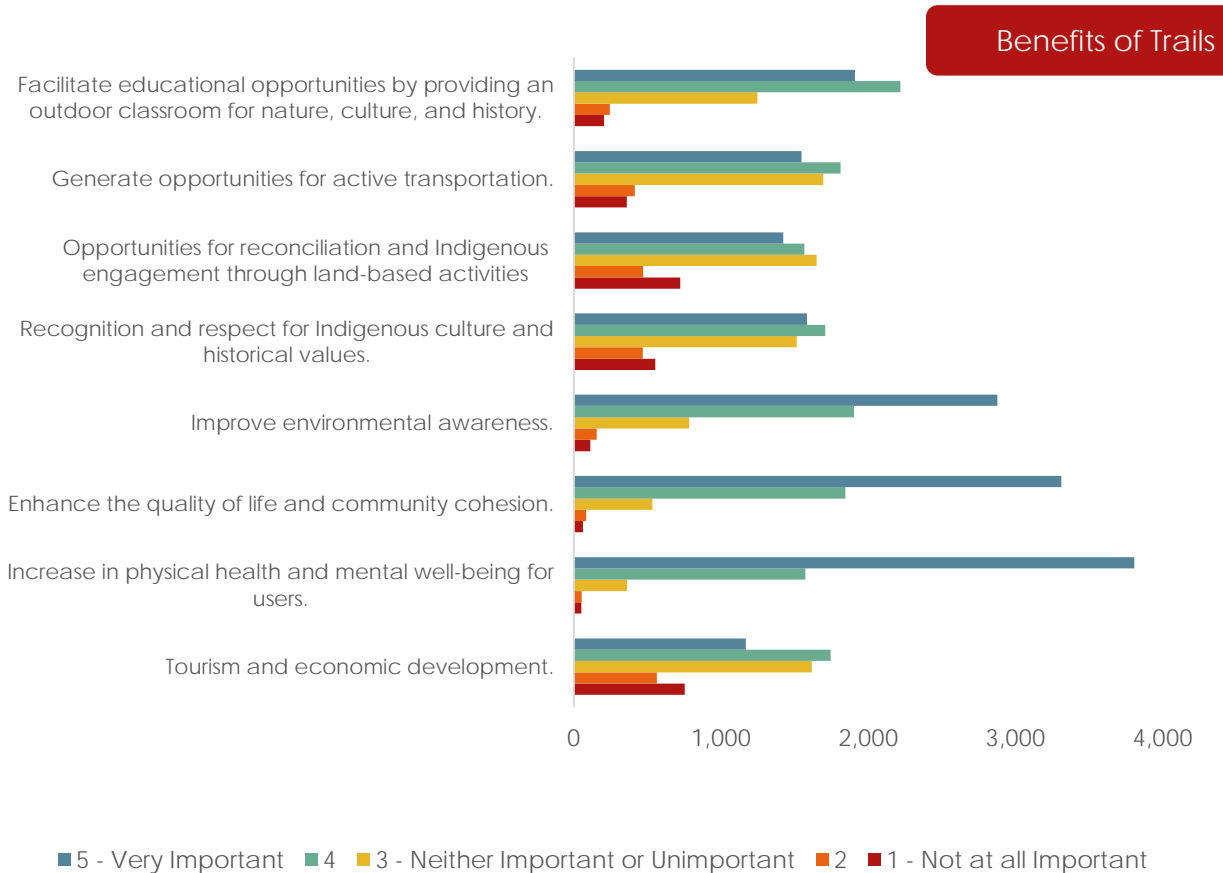
Increase in tourism including “Instagram tourism” which can result in overcrowding on certain trails.



Increase in climate related events such as wildfires and flooding which can damage the trail systems.

What are the challenges and opportunities for the trail system in B.C.?

We heard that the most important benefits of the trail systems in BC are to increase the physical and mental well-being of users and enhance quality of life along with community cohesion. In addition, it is important that the trail system improves environmental awareness and facilitate education opportunities.



The challenges being faced by the trail system in B.C. at this time are a lack of funding to maintain trails, conflicts between different trail users, lack of proper trail use and etiquette by trail users, and over-usage.

We also heard that to improve the trail systems in BC, priority should be put to:

- Increasing funding for the maintenance of existing trails.
- Increasing funding for the development of new trails.
- Reducing impacts to water, wildlife, soils and other environmental factors.

Accessibility

We found support for creating accessible trails and heard the following suggestions for making trails more accessible to people with diverse cognitive and physical abilities:

- Provide accessible parking and washrooms at trailheads.
- Provide options to rent adaptive equipment such as bikes, trail riders and beach wheelchairs.
- Provide transportation to adaptive trails.
- Allocate funding for the development and maintenance of adaptive trails.
- Have days where existing clubs and associations bring those with diverse needs on group excursions.



Traits of World Class Trail Systems

People listed trails throughout B.C. and the world that they believe are ‘world class’. They also listed the traits of these trails and trail networks which include:



How could consultation and collaboration be improved?

57% have been made aware of public engagements

61% of those aware have attended a public engagement

British Columbians believe there is a need for greater collaboration between associations and clubs as well as that trail planning should bring all relevant stakeholders together including provincial, regional and local governments, industry, landowners, First Nations, environmental organizations and tourism organizations. Other suggestions raised through the survey include:

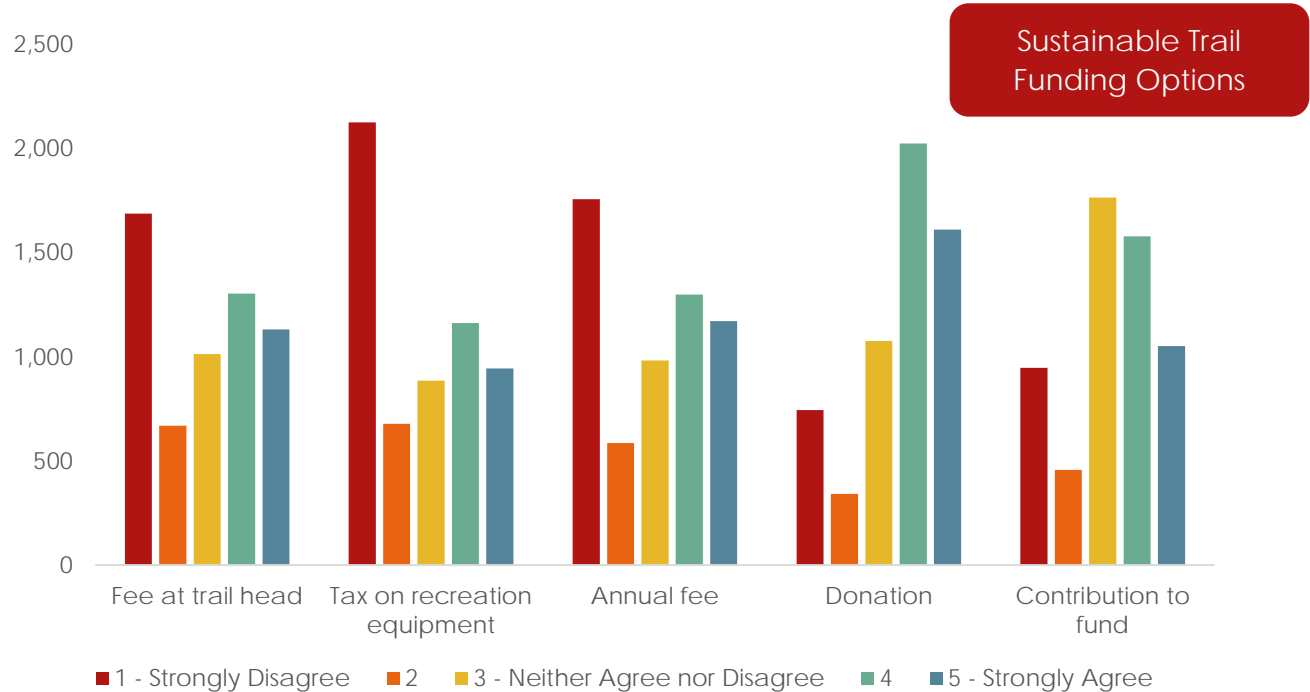
- The provincial government should facilitate face to face planning with broad stakeholder groups.
- Collaboration between local and regional governments is needed to fund the development and maintenance of trails.
- Regional land planning should include trails.
- First Nations should be supported to address various requests for consultations.
- Industry should be engaged to create agreements that keep resource roads open.

Respondents also spoke to gathering input from the public during trail planning and development and suggested:

- Better advertising of public engagement opportunities.
- Multiple mediums for engagement (in person, online, and surveys with a local focus).

How could the trail system be made more financially sustainable?

The survey asked respondents to rate their level of support with several trail funding methods. This question was asked in order to get an understanding of what methods should be further explored through additional research and consultation.



People were most in agreement with donating to a non-government fund for the purpose of supporting trail building and maintenance. Similarly, people were somewhat supportive of contributing to a fund created for recreation like the BC Parks Park Enhancement Fund or the Off-Road Vehicle Trail Fund.

- Those areas most in agreement with a small fee at the trail head were North Coast, Northeast and Cariboo with 58 percent, 52 percent and 50 percent respectively.
- There was little agreement at all with having a tax on recreation equipment.
- Across all regions there was approximately 40 percent agreement with a yearly fee to access all trails.
- People were generally supportive of a donation system to support trail building and maintenance with the most support (67 percent) being found in the North Coast and least support (59 percent) in the Cariboo.
- There was some variation in levels of support for donations to a recreation fund with the North Coast (58 percent), Northeast (52 percent), Mainland/Southwest (47 percent) and Thompson Okanagan (47 percent) being the most in agreement.

How do trails integrate with the transportation network?

Most people were neutral on transportation issues, although a few areas of interest in the survey include:

Disagreement with:

- Safe cycling routes are provided when constructing roadways in my community.
- Proper roadway crossings are provided for off-road motorized vehicles in my community.

Agreement with:

- The benefits of active transportation are clear.
- It is required to use public roads to access trails in my community.

Conclusions and Next Steps

We appreciate all survey responses that were provided during this public engagement period. We have heard that trails are important to British Columbian's across the province for their benefits to health and mental health and for connections with nature. We recognize that trail users care deeply for the environment and want all types of trail users to be able to enjoy the outdoors.

The next step in this engagement process includes a survey of local government representatives and interviews with several key provincial organizations. The Provincial Trails Advisory Body will meet in the fall of 2020 to consider all engagement findings and develop an implementation strategy.