



Outdoor Recreation  
Council of BC

September 2, 2021

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria BC V8V 1X4

**2022 Budget Consultation: Notes for our Presentation, September 3, 2021.**

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services,

The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC is a charitable organization composed of organizational members representing the broad and diverse spectrum of outdoor recreation user groups in BC, including paddlers, hikers, mountain bikers, off-road motorcyclists, equestrians, snowmobilers, quad riders, 4WDs, anglers and nature interests.

Our vision is that recreation and outdoor places are valued as essential to healthy individuals and vibrant communities and that every British Columbian has access to meaningful outdoor recreation experiences. We work to promote and advocate for access to and responsible use of BC's outdoors for public recreation, build bridges between outdoor recreation groups and represent the broad interests of the public outdoor recreation community to government.

On behalf of our members, board and staff, we would like to thank the Select Standing Committee on Finance & Government Services for considering our recommendations for the 2022 provincial budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'L. A. Pedersen'.

Louise Pedersen  
Executive Director - Outdoor Recreation Council of BC

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## 2022 Budget Consultation Presentation Notes

In addition to a healthy and educated population, BC's greatest asset is the natural environment. From our national and provincial parks to local trails and green spaces, from alpine lakes to mighty rivers and a vast coastline, BC's outdoor recreation assets are the building blocks of a diverse and sustainable economy and healthy and thriving communities.

As communities in the province strive to develop sustainable and diversified economies less tied to a single extractive resource industry, outdoor recreation offers a promising path to prosperity. Yet, the resources for BC's outdoor recreation economy cannot be taken for granted. The more we protect and invest in public land and water infrastructure and facilitate quality recreational experiences for all British Columbians, the greater and longer-lasting the dividends in the form of healthier communities, healthier economies and healthier people.

BC's provincial outdoor recreation assets are facing several pressing issues, including degradation of recreation infrastructure through a lack of maintenance, overuse and also sadly through vandalism, lack of facilities such as outhouses, wildlife-proof garbage containers and signage, environmental and cultural impacts, and insufficient staff and budgets to plan and to maintain these valuable assets. We are also very concerned about an increasing loss of road access to trailheads, recreation sites and wilderness areas due to a lack of maintenance and deactivations of forest service roads resulting from insufficient provincial funding<sup>1</sup>.

The growing interest in the usage of outdoor recreation amenities has elevated the pressure on Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC) and more investments are urgently needed to enhance its operational capacity. With a staff of only 50 people and an \$8 million annual operating budget, this provincial agency oversees legally established sites, trails and interpretive forests on 80% of the BC land base (over 750,000 square kilometres or 15,000 km<sup>2</sup> per staff member). Following the reorganization of the recreation program in 2006 and in response to a smaller budget and large workload, RSTBC has entered into nearly four hundred partnership agreements with recreation groups to manage trails and sites. While the intention was for RSTBC to only manage campsites, interpretative forests and trails, the agency is increasingly being called upon by the provincial government for expert input and collaboration on dispersed recreation resources (outside of established campsites and trails)<sup>2</sup>.

Whereas RSTBC's mandate has been consistently growing, operational funding has effectively been diminishing due to the impacts of inflation and increasing amortizations costs associated with its capital program. A historical lack of provincial investments in enhancing the operational capacity of RSTBC means that this crucial provincial recreation agency now faces a very significant maintenance backlog, obsolete inventory and data systems, an overreliance on

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<sup>1</sup> Auditor General of British Columbia (2021): [Management of Forest Service Roads](#).

<sup>2</sup> Forest Practices Board (2021): [Management of Forest Recreation in BC](#).

partnerships with volunteer recreation groups without providing adequate support, and is unable to effectively participate in land use and recreation planning, and safeguard wildlife, environmental and cultural values.

Many of our members report that it's almost impossible to reach a recreation officer, and recreation groups are experiencing many difficulties in getting the necessary authorization permits to construct, rehabilitate, and maintain trails and other recreational facilities due to staffing shortages. This is also putting many worthy projects that have received COVID-recovery support, including Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program funding, in jeopardy.

Well-planned and managed recreation amenities are an integral part of the outdoor recreation economy and BC's brand as a \$20.5 billion tourist destination and contribute as a preventative and curative strategy to combat mental illness and physical inactivity in adults and children. Unless we start to make more significant investments in Recreation Sites and Trails BC, similar to what the Province did for BC Parks in this year's budget<sup>3</sup>, we will see a continued decline in recreation experiences, more conflicts, destruction of the natural areas that the sector relies on, and the many benefits to BC's rural communities and the Province as a whole will not materialize.

A significant annual operational budget uplift will put British Columbia in a much greater position to develop a world-class trail and recreation system that facilitates broad, inclusive and diverse participation in outdoor recreation and follows best practices for trail and site designs and environmental considerations. Bold investments will facilitate rural economic development, achieve community health benefits, foster reconciliation through increased Indigenous representation in recreation planning, development and management, support recreation groups who are instrumental in developing and maintaining facilities and trails under partnership agreements with the agency, and reduce impacts to the environment, species at risk and archaeological values through planning, education and compliance efforts.

The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services has previously recognized these significant shortfalls, and a recommendation was made last year to increase operational funding for RSTBC<sup>4</sup>.

Our recommendations are:

1. Increase the annual operational budget of Recreation Sites and Trails BC to a minimum of \$20 million. This will provide the agency with more staffing and better operational support to deal with increasing demands and greater complexities related to public land

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<sup>3</sup> CBC News (2021): B.C. [Parks budget to increase by \\$83 million over three years following summer of record demand](#)

<sup>4</sup> Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services (2020): Budget 2021 Consultation Report ([volume 1](#))

use, facilitate more recreation opportunities for communities across BC, and support volunteer recreation clubs who work in partnership with RSTBC.

2. Create a new ministerial position as parliamentary secretary for outdoor recreation under the Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development. There is currently no BC cabinet member who has a sole focus on outdoor recreation and who can work with other ministries and levels of government to develop, promote and fund policies and programs that support a strong and sustainable outdoor recreation sector, including an overarching outdoor recreation strategy for BC.
3. Make a commitment to a dedicated \$75 million annual investment in BC's watershed security through the Watershed Security Fund. A Water Security Fund would provide sustainable funding to equip communities to build resilience in the face of growing watershed threats, such as extreme floods, droughts, forest fires, and implications for clean drinking water, Indigenous rights, and wild salmon habitat.