

November 22, 2022

The Honourable David Eby, MLA
Premier of British Columbia

RE: Funding for BC Parks, Recreation Sites and Trails BC and community-based trail stewardship groups

Dear Premier,

Congratulations on your appointment as the new Premier of British Columbia.

As a broad coalition representing the interests of the recreation and tourism sectors, we, the undersigned, ask you, as the new Premier, to ensure that Budget 2023 includes provisions for long-term sustainable funding to support the outdoor sector and BC's communities.

We were pleased that the 2023 consultation report recommends continuing to invest in BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC and ensuring BC's volunteer trail stewardship groups have the resources they need to continue improving access to outdoor recreation.

We believe that to build on these recommendations; the BC Government needs to:

- Increase the annual operational budget of Recreation Sites and Trails BC to \$20 million and the annual budget of BC Parks to \$100 million.
- Adopt the recommendations from the Provincial Trails Advisory Body to amend the Trails Strategy for British Columbia and confirm adequate support for the implementation of the updated trails strategy.
- Invest \$10 million in a BC Trail Fund to provide reliable funding to community-based organizations that help maintain the viability of BC trails (bit.ly/3ACBiOm).

A recent academic study indicates that the economic benefits of outdoor recreation to British Columbians could be more than 15 billion dollars annually (bit.ly/3Vfyhvi). Well-managed trails and outdoor spaces are integral to BC's outdoor recreation economy and our reputation as a world-class destination. Outdoor recreation facilitates rural economic development, community health benefits and social inclusion, reconciliation through collaboration and Indigenous involvement in planning and management, and reduces environmental impacts. Outdoor recreation and adventure tourism are vital to the transition of the green economy, yet, the outdoor spaces and the values that the sector depends on are increasingly at risk.

The surging interest in outdoor recreation, accelerated by the pandemic, is already straining limited resources. British Columbians report a lack of parking, access and basic sanitation facilities, aging recreation infrastructure, environmental and wildlife impacts, maintenance backlogs and staffing shortages.

Without sustainable funding, BC's communities risk losing the valuable contributions of community-based recreation groups that help ensure safe access to hundreds of recreation sites. These groups help maintain more than twenty percent of the province's trails (8,500km) annually. They face pressing challenges, including increasing volunteer burnout and limited access to funds.

For the past several years, the Province's Budget Committee has recommended that the BC Government invest more in staffing and maintenance for BC's two provincial recreation agencies, BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC, and provides more support for community-based trail stewardship groups.

The recommendations in the 2023 budget consultation report are to:

- Continue to invest in BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC to address gaps in maintenance and staff, including dedicated funding to community-based organizations for trail maintenance and development.
- Build the capacity of volunteers by establishing discretionary funding to ensure that BC's trail and park maintenance volunteers have the resources they need to continue to improve the accessibility of outdoor recreation.

New investments are crucial to ensure outdoor recreation is accessible to everyone - and that nature stays clean and beautiful.

British Columbians agree. A recent Ipsos survey confirmed that 85% of outdoor recreation participants support more government investment in the development and maintenance of trails, parks and other recreation amenities in the province (bit.ly/3D0Fgk9).

Last year, British Columbians celebrated when the provincial government allocated \$83 million over three years to bolster recreation infrastructure in BC Parks. However, recreation areas outside of parks, where 85% of the province's land base is found, have yet to see similar support. Particularly forgotten is the provincial agency Recreation Sites and Trails BC, which oversees 15,000 km of trails and 2,200 recreation sites on Crown land with only 50 staff and an \$8 million operating budget.

Budget 2023 provides an immediate opportunity to put support in place for outdoor recreation and invest in staffing, management planning, maintenance and support for the recreation groups, the adventure tourism sector and Indigenous communities who work in partnership with the Province to develop and maintain BC's recreation infrastructure and undertake environmental stewardship.

Premier, thank you for your consideration. We would be delighted to answer any questions or provide further information upon your request.

Sincerely,

Kathy McRae and Scott Ellis, Adventure Tourism Coalition
Gilles Valade, Avalanche Canada
Brian Marriott, Back Country Horsemen of BC
Brad Harrison, Backcountry Lodges of BC
Russell Mussio, Backroad Mapbooks
Rod Clapton, BC Federation of Drift Fishers
Myles Armstead, BC Federation of Fly Fishers
Joss Penny, BC Lodging and Campgrounds Association
Paul Grey, BC Marine Trails
Alan Burger, BC Nature
Ken McClelland, BC Off-Road Motorcycle Association
Katie Fenn, BC Recreation and Parks Association
Scott Benton, BC River Outfitters Association
Barry Janyk, BC Rural Centre Society
Donegal Wilson, BC Snowmobile Federation
Kathy McRae, Commercial Bear Viewing Association of BC
Bill Wilson, Council of BC Yacht Clubs
Wannes Luppens, Cross Country BC
Colin Campbell, Elders Council for Parks in BC
Liz Bicknell, Federation of Mountain Clubs and Vancouver Island Trails Association
Kim Reeves, Four Wheel Drive Association of BC
Sarah Allison, Horse Council BC
Patrick Harrison, Hike BC
Dean Campbell, IMBA Canada
Matt Mosteller, Kootenay Outdoor Recreation Enterprise Society
Richard Vinson, Leave No Trace Canada
Martin Littlejohn, Mountain Bike Tourism Association
Todd Lawson, Mountain Life Magazine
Louise Pedersen, Outdoor Recreation Council of BC
Alan Crisp, Pinkbike
Ali Wines, Protect Our Winters
Chris D'Silva, Quad Riders ATV Association of BC
Kieran Rankin, Recreational Canoeing Association of BC
Walt Judas, Tourism Industry Association of BC
Trevor May, Trailforks
Ciel Sander, Trails Society of BC
Eleanor McMahon, Trans Canada Trail
Richard Harley, Valhalla Pure Outfitters, Vancouver and Courtenay
Jeneen Sutherland, Wilderness Tourism Association of BC

