

2021 BUDGET SUBMISSION

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE & GOVERNMENT SERVICES



Outdoor Recreation
Council of BC

The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (ORC) is an umbrella organization composed of organizational members that represent the broad and diverse spectrum of outdoor recreation user groups in BC, including paddlers, hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, quad riders, 4WDs, sport fishers and nature interests.



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 outdoor recreation community to government and industry.

We're pleased about this opportunity to provide our recommendations for the 2021 provincial budget.



OUTDOORSY BY NATURE

Surveys show that a majority of British Columbians consider outdoor recreation to be very important to them and that nine out of ten adults participate on a regular basis (1).

Spending time outdoors is a source of physical activity, socializing, enhanced knowledge of our natural surroundings, enjoyment and quality of life.



Outdoor recreation plays a significant role in strengthening communities all across BC in several ways:

Economically through the creation of trails and facilities as amenities that spur economic development and diversification in our rural towns.

Although BC is among Canada's fastest-growing provinces, our rural population is projected to shrink with a decrease of 12.5% between 2011 and 2025 (2).



But some small communities, including Kimberley, Revelstoke, Penticton and Cumberland, are bucking the trend, maintaining stable or even growing populations with revitalized economies and cultures.

Many of these communities are experiencing an influx of new residents attracted to the natural beauty, unique lifestyle, and opportunities for outdoor recreation. These new arrivals have been dubbed "amenity migrants" and are among the most critical drivers shaping the future of BC's rural landscape (2).



Trails and parks are also essential for **improving and maintaining healthy communities**. Communities that have easy access to outdoor recreation opportunities tend to have safer and livelier neighbourhoods, higher levels of volunteer engagement and environmental stewardship.

Social bonds are strengthened when families and community members participate in outdoor recreation together and when seniors and individuals with disabilities are actively engaged in recreation activities, including organized club activities.



Outdoor recreation can play a critical role in **supporting Indigenous reconciliation**. There is tremendous value in incorporating Indigenous knowledge, culture and perspectives in the planning and management of recreation and trail projects.

With each of these efforts, there is an opportunity to foster the kind of relationships with Indigenous communities that we want to build for the future (3).



It is not only residents of BC who enjoy our parks and recreation opportunities.

More than 6 million international tourists visit BC each year, and the vast majority come here to participate in outdoor activities such as hiking, skiing, paddling, mountain biking and whale watching (4).



BC.'s tourism industry added the most significant value to the provincial economy between 2007 and 2017, relative to the primary resource industries, including oil and gas, forestry and fisheries. In 2018, tourism contributed \$20.5B to BC's economy (5).

This makes BC's spectacular scenery, recreation infrastructure and diversity of outdoor activities some of our most valuable assets which we need to protect and invest in.



The vision of the [Trails Strategy of British Columbia](#) is a "a world-renowned, sustainable network of trails, with opportunities for all, which provides benefits for trails users, communities and the province."

Currently there are 30,000 km of recreational trails on public land in BC. These trails are largely built, maintained and paid for by volunteer outdoor groups in partnership with two provincial agencies; BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC (6).



Trail-related outdoor recreation is becoming increasingly popular with locals and visitors, and this puts enormous demands on volunteer groups and on the agencies who have the overall responsibility for these trails.

Strategic Investments in outdoor recreation can have tremendous returns in terms of health, social cohesion, rural economic development, sustainable resource management, and indigenous reconciliation.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase the annual operational budget of Recreation Sites and Trails BC with \$4M.

Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC) is pivotal in facilitating rural economic development, achieving community health benefits and fostering reconciliation through the development of trails and recreation sites across BC.



In collaboration with communities and recreation groups, RSTBC develop, manage and promote a network of designated recreation sites, trails and facilities, engages with Indigenous peoples in collaborative trail planning, and authorizes construction of trails on public land outside of BC's protected areas system.

Recreation Sites and Trails BC manages more than 1,372 recreation sites, 29 interpretive forests, 197 area-based trail networks and 569 trails that add up to 12,000 kilometers in all regions of the province.



With only 50 staff members and an \$8M annual budget, it's evident that they are severely underfunded and do not have the needed capacity to meet current demands.

An annual budget uplift of an extra \$4M in operational funding will allow RSTBC to increase its staff by 33% and increase its operating budget by 30-40 percent (7).

This necessary boost will allow for better planning and communications with Indigenous peoples and recreational user groups who are instrumental in developing and maintaining facilities and trails under partnership agreements with the agency.



2. Increase the annual budget of BC Parks by \$60M.

The ORC recommends that the annual budget of BC Parks be increased for the 2021 fiscal year to \$60M so that it approaches a level which would be adequate for the responsible management and maintenance of BC's provincial parks system.



Every dollar invested in BC's protected areas system generates \$8 in visitor spending. In total, this provides a \$392-million-dollar boost to GDP and supports over 5,200 full-time jobs. Any additional funding for BC Parks will result in similar economic benefits (8).

The BC park system is vital for the BC economy and the well-being of our residents, which is why the 2021 BC budget must help ensure the long-term health of BC's environment, economic interests, and recreation assets within the parks system.



3. Establish a Water Security Fund with an endowment of \$600M

The ORC is part of the Watershed Security Coalition and we are asking the Provincial and Federal governments to invest \$600M to create a BC 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 more extreme floods, droughts, and forest fires, and implications for clean drinking water, Indigenous rights, and wild salmon habitat.

The ORC's Rivers Chair, Mark Angelo, has previously made recommendations for such a fund to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.



REFERENCES:

(1) Destination BC (2013): [2009/10 BC Resident Study](#).

(2) ORC (2020): [How amenity migration is reshaping BC's rural landscape](#).

(3) ORC (2019): [Working in a Good Way](#).

(4) Destination BC (2019): Provincial Tourism Indicators: [2019 Year in Review](#).

(5) Destination BC (2020): [2018 Value of Tourism](#).

(6) Province of BC (2013): [Trails Strategy for British Columbia](#).

(7) RSTBC (2020): Personal communications.

(8) BC Parks (2020): [Infographic](#).



THANK YOU

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 2021 budget.



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