



2023 Budget Consultation - speaking notes

Good afternoon, everyone. It's a real pleasure and privilege to be here in person with you today, thank you. My name is Louise Pedersen and I'm the executive director for the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia.

The ORC is a charitable organization composed of organizational members representing the broad and diverse spectrum of outdoor recreation user groups, including paddlers, hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, snowmobilers, dirt bikers, and sport fishers and other nature interests. We indirectly represent more than 100,000 British Columbians.

We work to promote and advocate for access to and responsible use of BC's outdoors for public recreation, build bridges between the different user groups and represent the broad interests of the public outdoor recreation community to government.

I am here today to make three recommendations to this committee for next year's provincial budget which I will make in a moment.

A new Ipsos survey conducted on behalf of the ORC showed that seven out of ten British Columbians have participated in outdoor recreation in the past year and that 93% value the benefits of it for their mental and physical health. Ninety percent agree that participating in outdoor recreation helps them grow their appreciation for nature. Three out of four (74%) agree that access to good outdoor recreation opportunities is an important reason they chose to live in their communities. Lastly, 85% of outdoor recreation participants support more government investment in the development and maintenance of trails, parks and other recreation amenities in the province.

One of BC's greatest assets is indeed our 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 resources 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, 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 outdoor recreation infrastructure on public lands, create supportive legislation and policies and provide

opportunities for collaborative land use planning, the greater and longer-lasting the dividends in the form of healthier communities, healthier economies and healthier people.

Recommendations:

1. Increase the budgets of BC's two provincial recreation agencies: Recreation Sites and Trails BC and BC Parks

As has already been raised during this consultation by several of our members including the Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC, the increasing demand for outdoor activities among British Columbians and our visitors and historic under-investments by the Province means that our outdoor recreation assets are currently facing several pressing issues including degradation of recreation infrastructure through a lack of maintenance and overuse, lack of essential 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.

We ask that the annual operational budget of Recreation Sites and Trails BC is increased to a minimum of \$20 million and the annual budget of BC Parks to \$100 million.

2. Adopt the recommendations from the Provincial Trails Advisory Body to amend the Trails Strategy for British Columbia and confirm adequate provincial support for the implementation of the updated trails strategy.

The Provincial Trails Advisory Body's primary role is to advise the provincial government on implementing the Trails Strategy for BC and conduct a regular review of the strategy. The PTAB concluded a thorough review of the strategy in 2021 and presented its recommendations to the provincial government on the implementation status and how best to improve the strategy to ensure it delivers as much value to British Columbia as possible.

An improved strategy, along with resources to facilitate effective implementation, will help ensure that we can take a much more strategic, coordinated and collaborative approach to trail-based recreation and leverage the Province's strategic goals for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, rural development, diversity and inclusion, active transportation, healthy lifestyles, and COVID-19 economic recovery efforts.

3. Invest \$10 million in a new BC Trail Fund to provide reliable funding for trail clubs, First Nations and local governments that deliver ongoing stewardship of the BC's network of recreational trails and facilities.

The development and maintenance of BC trails and recreation infrastructure rely heavily on grassroots support from over two hundred community-based recreation groups who

report increasing burnout and face limited access to funding to support their work, especially for trail maintenance. The BC Trail Fund will be created in response to a longstanding need for a reliable and diverse funding model to support BC's trail system.

It will be managed by the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia and the Vancouver Foundation, with oversight by an advisory committee. Additional contributions will be solicited from government, corporations, foundations and individuals as part of an ongoing fund development program.