

March 4, 2021

Jackie.Tegart.MLA@leg.bc.ca

Dear MLA Jackie Tegart,

RE: Managing Increased Camping and Backcountry Use Through Increased Funding for Rec Sites and Parks

The COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for everyone. As Naturalists in the Lillooet area, we spend time in the outdoors, and have observed first-hand the recent increased use of public lands, rec sites and BC Parks. Last summer, we witnessed a large increase in traffic from the lower mainland, as people were desperate to escape from their isolation and recreate. While it is positive to see British Columbians engaging in healthy activity exploring their backyards, it has put pressure on existing facilities, particularly as so many were closed. This heightened interest in outdoor recreation is likely to continue, even as we come out of the pandemic.

Closed campgrounds and trails do not prevent people from leaving their isolation or staying in their Health Districts. Closures simply force people into unregulated and undeveloped areas which lack toilets, where campfires become wildfire risks, where litter is left behind and where the potential for wildlife conflict increases. This is exacerbated by the fact that novice backcountry visitors often lack the experience to act appropriately, despite their best intentions.

Rec Sites and BC Parks bring direct benefits to local communities in terms of health and wellness, social relationships, environmental awareness, rural economic development and Indigenous reconciliation. These trails and recreation areas and Parks also provide world-class visitor experiences as premier trail access points, and are drivers of our essential tourism economy.

Unfortunately, our recreation system has been severely compromised due to decades of chronic underfunding. We have overburdened trail networks, recreation sites that have fallen into disrepair or closed, cultural and environmental damage, a huge backlog of deferred maintenance, too few staff, and volunteer recreation groups who are burnt out by the sheer volume of work and a lack of support.

Now is the time, as budget is being set, for the BC government to support a much needed and overdue investment in both Recreation Sites and Trails BC and BC Parks. Increased funding is critical to maintain BC's superior recreational product, and to manage the rapidly increasing numbers backcountry users.

The Lillooet Naturalist Society requests you support the recent Province-wide movement by several tourism and recreation organizations asking the BC government to increase RSTBC's annual operating budget by \$4 million, and similarly increase the BC Parks budget to ensure our Parks remain open and effectively managed this summer. Doing so will help stimulate BC's economic recovery, support reconciliation, environmental stewardship, rural economic development and the physical and mental health of British Columbians.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,



Geoff Playfair,

President, Lillooet Naturalist Society

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