



Whistler Recreational Trails Strategy

Topic: Communications

This topic covers ways to more consistently, efficiently, and effectively communicate information between land managers and trail user groups.

Initial Directions

These 'initial directions' are being considered for implementation as next steps after the development of the RTS. They were developed based on the force field analysis and the background information below in this document, and with input from staff and these RMOW committees: the Trails Planning Working Group, the Whistler Bear Advisory Committee, the Forests and Wildlands Advisory Committee, and the Recreation and Leisure Advisory Committee.

1. Develop a communication strategy for effectively communicating trail related closures and other announcements to trail users that:
 - a) Is coordinated across land managers and trail groups, identifying who is responsible for what
 - b) Clarifies key messages to ensure users are aware, in advance, of trail openings, closures and other issues, and they understand the importance of respecting closures. Where possible explain why trails are closed and why it's important to respect them would help inform announcements
2. Expand the use of on-site information boards (e.g., dry erase) at high-use staging areas or trailheads to reach users who may not be connected to other information channels.

Force Field Analysis

Helping Forces

Helping forces are the positive internal and external factors affecting this topic area, including internal strengths/assets and external opportunities/levers.

1. Land managers and trail organizations have a wide variety of tools (email, websites, newsletters, social media) at their disposal to use in communicating important information with trail users and the public
2. These various forms of communication are used regularly and effectively on a wide range of topics related to trail use, maintenance, fundraising, wildlife, and other relevant topics
3. Use of social media accounts can reach a wide and diverse audience quickly compared to more traditional forms of communication
4. Growth in use and prevalence of third-party apps such as Trailforks and Alltrails can provide user generated and up to date information about trail conditions or other issues, and allow land managers and trail groups to communicate specific issues or closures at the information source
5. Established processes as related to opening and closing of the Rainbow and Sproatt Alpine trail network, especially as related to weather and/or grizzly bear issues, has proven to be effective



Hindering Forces

Hindering forces are the negative internal and external factors affecting this topic area, including internal weaknesses/gaps and external threats.

1. The importance and rationale for respecting closures is not always communicated clearly, consistently and effectively which can lead to some users believing the closures can be ignored.
2. Communication strategies across land managers and trail groups are generally ad-hoc and uncoordinated, while messaging can be similar in nature to a 'broken telephone' effect can occur causing a dilution or miscommunication of the message and may not come in a timely manner
3. Staffing changes and/or relying on volunteers within trail organizations can lead to ineffective implementation of these communications, especially if there is not a formalized process established
4. Lack of coordinated information across platforms can lead to trail users not being aware of closures ahead of time they may choose to ignore the closure given time and energy invested getting to that location and may be unwilling to adjust their plans as necessary
5. Broad range of communicating forms and platforms can lead to inconsistent and out of date information including date stamps adding to confusion and inappropriate trip planning decision making.
6. Third party apps have a variety of responsiveness when requesting permanent changes and immediate communication needs.
7. Social media use is declining or shifting in some respects so it may not continue to be the best or easiest avenue to reach users
8. Email blasts, newsletters or website updates tend to only reach active members and can miss visitors or other public users

Trail Opening and Closure Communications – Background Information

This background information has informed the Force Field and Initial Directions. It has been reviewed by staff and the four RMOW committees (listed above) and refined based on their input.

Communicating trail related opening and closure information to the community is generally completed on an ad-hoc basis, with land managers, and local clubs or community groups each utilizing their own processes to disseminate up to date information to the public. While these processes follow similar approaches, they can be inconsistent and may not necessarily convey the necessary information in a timely, coordinated, or coherent fashion. It is also possible that some needs may be left unaddressed and not addressed. With inevitable personnel changes it is possible that ad hoc communication systems fail without more formal documentation to outline expectations and protocol for keeping different platforms up to date.

Groups

Groups within Whistler that regularly require ongoing communication and information transfer to their membership and the general public include the following primary organizations. In terms of races or commercial events, trail related closures are generally communicated by the local clubs responsible for managing or maintaining the trails as opposed to the event promoters themselves.

- First Nations



- Lil'wat Nation
 - Squamish Nation
- Land managers
 - FLNRORD/RSTBC
 - BC Conservation Service
 - RMOW
 - BC Parks
 - Cheakamus Community Forest
 - BC Hydro
 - Whistler Blackcomb
 - Other
- Clubs and Community Groups
 - ACC-Whistler
 - Whistler Off-Road Cycling Association
 - 99 Trials
 - We Run Whistler
 - Commercial community activities (e.g. Lululemon)
 - Other

Reasons for Closures

Types of information that needs to be regularly communicated to the trail using public can include routine ongoing maintenance activities and current trail conditions requiring awareness but not trail closures. Additionally, temporary closures of trails may be required due to newly constructed trail work that could be damaged, more significant trail maintenance requirements such as bridge replacements or major reroutes, danger tree removal, or significant environmental issues such as those resulting from prolonged wet weather and sensitive trails. Significant temporary closures could also be required due to environmental protection such as wildlife presence like grizzly bears or cougars which could threaten user safety or the ability of the wildlife to forage during critical times of the year like spring and fall. Other serious events including high or extreme fire ratings, or active wildfires also requires effective communications strategies to protect the landscape, the trail users, and the general public. While less frequent, various types of races or commercial events could also impact trail access and use. While permanent closures of trails are less frequent, communication could also be required to ensure the public understands the rationale for the decision to ensure compliance.

General categories of issues that require or could be considered for ongoing public communication include the following;

- Time/Seasonal Closures
 - Area closures for winter periods
 - Trails that are in areas susceptible to impacts from use during spring melt or fall rain or
 - Time of day closures (dusk to dawn) for safety and/or wildlife movement reasons
- Trail conditions
 - Prolonged wet weather or extreme weather events and sensitive trails necessitating limiting user frequency
 - Early or late season conditions affecting trails (rain, snow, seepage)
 - Tree fall/damage
 - Bridge or other Technical Trail Feature issues
- Trail maintenance activities
 - Ongoing general maintenance



- Major maintenance, reroutes, or rebuilds
 - Fresh dirt work requiring time to set up
- **Wildlife**
 - Area closures in recognition of or in response to heightened wildlife activity
 - Seasonal closures for Trails located in areas providing important spring or fall foraging habitat for wildlife (e.g., Blackcomb CRA spring bear foraging habitat)
 - Grizzly bear presence for foraging (e.g., Sproatt/Rainbow alpine networks)
 - Problem/Habituated bears requiring temporary closure of areas (e.g., BC Parks Cheakamus Lake/Taylor Meadows areas)
 - Lost Lake Park toad migration closures
- **Forest Management**
 - Temporary trail closures related to logging activities including silviculture and forest fire thinning.
 - Log hauling on shared access routes
- **Construction (CRA/Development/etc)**
 - Typically associated with trails on private property or areas used for commercial or municipal infrastructure development
 - Could be permanent or temporary closures
 - Risk to safety of public due to activities (blasting, clearing, equipment, etc)
- **Race or events**
 - Local events which use but don't close trails
 - Commercial events and races which may require short term closures for training and racing

Communication Approaches

Agencies, land managers, and clubs and groups generally utilize similar approaches to communicating trail related closures, announcements, or ongoing management issues to the general public. These approaches include

- **Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)**
 - Utilized by most groups and organizations on a regular basis, and some as their primary method
 - Extensive reach, although can miss an increasing number of people not using those platforms
- **Email/Newsletters**
 - Requires users to opt in to mailing lists to receive regular information
 - Typically used in the form of weekly newsletters, updates, less urgent matters
 - Not always used to communicate immediate information
- **Websites**
 - Not as frequently visited by most users, so information can be present but not necessarily seen by most users on a regular basis
 - Not on many user's radars as places to look regularly for trail related information
- **Web Apps (e.g., Trailforks, Gaia, All trails, BC Trail Tracker, etc.)**
 - Immediate trail condition or communication related to specific trails or areas
 - Up to minute updates being available
 - Can mark trails as closed, or provide more general warnings for awareness related to weather, conditions, wildlife issues, or event use
 - Updates rely on active users to regularly update statuses, can lead to many trails not having accurate current conditions
- **Signboards (Dry Erase)**



- Provides information typically at trailheads or on key destination trails
- Information provided with date and time
- Can be labor intensive
- In Whistler used extensively on access points to the Sproatt and Rainbow alpine trail networks to provide ongoing and up to date information related to conditions or wildlife issues
- Requires ongoing updating in person (by a Ranger or other employee or trail group representative), not always easily accessible for updating
- Easiest method to reach most users of specific trails or areas at any given time of use
- Local Print Media
 - Wide reach including residents and visitors to the community
 - Limited to once a week, so can be less effective for short term issues
 - Can be useful for more in-depth communication of longer-term issues like seasonal or wildlife related closures
- Trail Heads
 - QR codes to link to up-to-date information via Trailforks or the website to get the most current information before dropping in to a trail