



Whistler Recreation Trails Strategy

Topic: Trail Funding

This topic focuses on long-term and sustainable funding models to support trail development and ongoing trail maintenance.

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. Explore long-term funding models to support for the ongoing maintenance of the trail network.
2. Leverage commercial and event use of the trail network to fund trail maintenance and construction. For example, establish a standardized and universal commercial fee program.
3. Pursue community amenity contributions from developers to support the trail network where relevant.
4. Investigate onsite donation opportunities at key staging areas and trailheads.
5. Investigate the economic value of volunteer labor contributed to maintaining the network and develop a risk assessment.

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.

- The recreation trail network in Whistler is a significant economic contributor to the community, local businesses, and residents, likely providing well more than \$20 million in yearly economic activity based upon assumptions made since the 2016 Economic Impact of Mountain Biking in Whistler study completed by Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance
- The RMOW invests significant funds from RMI, MRDT, Community Watershed Protection Fund, and general reserves into trail maintenance and protection of the municipal trail network and the Alpine Ranger program.
- The Fee for Service (FFS) support from the RMOW to WORCA has increased substantially over recent years, and as of 2023 amounts to \$269,000. It allows WORCA to complete significant trail modernization and upgrades which increases trail longevity and durability from increased use and weather-related impacts for multi-use trails.
- Community support is strong and consistent. WORCA members representing more than 10% of Whistler's resident population (measure by active memberships and club participation). The ACC (Whistler section) has a small group of dedicated volunteers that built and maintain the Skywalk



network and also directs effort into Garibaldi Provincial Park as it relates to the AAC Spearhead Huts program.

- Strong community support for regular trail nights/days allowing clubs to leverage volunteerism to help build and maintain trails.
- Local commercial and industry support of non-profit trails groups (such as WORCA) is generally strong and provides ongoing funds for trail maintenance and development projects of many multi-use trails through direct financial contributions or product donations for use in raffles.
- Trail supporter programs increase the awareness of maintenance efforts and requirements which helps foster a sense of ownership in users and provide opportunity for visitors to contribute without purchasing a membership.
- Commercial and event use of the network can provide funding in excess of requirements to mitigate impacts from the events, providing extra revenue to put into further maintenance or trail development.

Hindering Forces

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

- Requirement to reapply for FFS funding year to year can impede the ability to plan the longer term and/or multi-year projects
- Short term funding provided by the FFS or grants limits the ability of non-profit groups to plan and hire necessary operating season staff and compromises the ability to provide long-term staff security. This is made more tenuous given Whistler's labour and housing demands.
- Reduction in funding could impact ability to complete ongoing preventative maintenance which could negatively impact the long-term sustainability of the network, and potentially cause negative environmental impacts
- External economic factors can immediately and negatively affect funding programs and club memberships numbers as evidenced during COVID shutdowns
- Revenue from membership fees is also required to support other club activities and administration, cannot allocate all fees to trail related activities
- The perceived value of membership by the public tends to be derived through the direct benefits received (discounts, event participation, etc) as opposed to joining simply to support the club's activities
- The cost to implement and administer trail supporter programs can take away from the revenue generated
- Volunteer trail work is best suited to specific types of activities in specific locations, and without the right combination can result in limited success
- Commercial use of certain trails could cause more impact to mitigate than the related fees or donations cover
- Commercial use of trails can alienate club members or the community if the compensation to impact ratio is not appropriate. Event related impacts can drastically change the character of a trail regardless of the ability to repair damage, and that can be unacceptable to many users
- Fundraising raffles or draws can require significant effort and it must be a desirable prize for people to participate
- Some local trail advocacy groups volunteerism is constrained by memberships numbers



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Trail Funding – 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.

Costs associated with building and maintaining Whistler’s extensive recreation trail network are a significant consideration and can be a challenge for organizations to manage on a year-to-year basis. Ensuring that consistent and reliable funding is available for the groups maintaining the network helps ensure that the network remains world-class and continues to support the significant economic contribution that recreation trails provide to our community.

In addition to the trails being important assets to our residents for exercise and mental health, they also provide significant economic contributions through tourism and the world class renown they hold. The “Economic Impact of Mountain Biking in Whistler 2016” study found that Whistler’s non-Bike Park trail network generated approximately \$20,000,000 of economic activity in the Resort. In the years following Whistler has continued to see significant growth in part due to the development of the Sproatt and Rainbow alpine trail networks which have likely contributed to increasing that value for both hiking and mountain biking. Additionally, trail running has grown substantially, and running events have brought many new users and visitors to our area as they find the Whistler trail network ideal for their activity.

Ongoing costs of maintaining the RMOW managed network by the RMOW trail crews (as summarized below), in addition to the contributions to WORCA through the Fee-For-Service agreement (\$200,000 for 2021 with an increase to \$249,000 for 2022) are substantial, however current annual expenditures only equate to approximately one percent of the economic value as calculated in the 2016 economic impact study, based on mountain biking alone. The one percent FFS vs trail network economic value does not include other Municipal Park expenditures on trails or related infrastructure, or any other contributions such as local club fees or donations. Including hiking, trail running, and any other uses, in addition to accounting for the growth in use that we have seen in the five years since that study was released, the overall economic value of the recreation trail network likely exceeds \$20 million by a significant amount.

Current Maintenance Funding

The Municipal operation fund typically invests approximately \$235,000 annually, to maintain and repair trails and structures for which it is responsible. This value is funded via a combination of Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) and Municipal & Regional District Tax (MRDT) program funding, and General Reserves. Excluded from this are new construction, significant bridge replacements, trailhead amenity maintenance (i.e. washrooms, waste etc.), and signage.

The RMOW Alpine Ranger program represents an additional annual investment of approximately \$65,000 and is funded through a combination of and is funded through a combination of MRDT and the Water Operating Reserve.

Community Enrichment Program

The Community Enrichment Program (CEP) is an initiative of the RMOW to provide funding to non-profit organizations and societies based within the municipality that are considered by Council to be contributing to the general interest and advantage of the Whistler community. Funding is issued on an annual basis and is subject to the availability of funds in the RMOW’s current year’s budget. Approval of a funding application in any given year does not guarantee that funding will be granted in any subsequent year. The CEP (Council Policy A-7 Community Enrichment Program) is funded by local property tax.

Process



- To be eligible for CEP funding, the applicants must operate in one of the following categories: Environment, Social Services, Community Service, Recreation and Sport, or Arts and Culture

Limitations

- Funding under the CEP Program will not be approved for special events, including one-time events.
- Can be subject to unforeseen budgetary constraints and reductions as evidenced by the response to COVID-19 challenges.

Fee For Service

The RMOW also operates a Fee for Service (FFS) program whereby agreements are provided to partially fund organizations that provide services that Whistler Council considers necessary or desirable for Whistler. This allows the RMOW to leverage the skills and expertise of local non-profit groups to deliver services at a reduced cost compared to the municipality delivering those services directly.

The Fee For Service (Council Policy A-39) is funded from:

- FFS is funded by a combination of Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) and General Tax (municipal).
- Funding is subject to approval from
- MRDT – annually, Administrator/Destination BC
- General Tax - annually municipal budget process
- Funding can be rescinded if the RMOW suffers an unforeseen revenue shortfall

Process

- Eligible non-profit organizations must apply to the RMOW for acceptance and inclusion in the program

Limitations

- Time and effort by clubs to apply for Fee Service Agreements and limited funding across multiple non-profit groups outside of trails and recreation.
- Competition and unknown outcomes can result in only partial or no funding available.
- FFS provides a short-term (1-3 years) temporary funding model with potentially fluctuating values which can cause non-profit organizations to find it difficult to prepare for future planning, development and operational costs.
- A regular and long-term funding model is preferred by non-profit organizations whom directly contribute to a community and tourism infrastructure resource. They tend to have fluctuating costs that brings economic activity to the community rather than a non-profit whose income is structured from year to year that provide community support services.
- Short term funding provided by the FFS limits the ability of non-profit groups to plan and hire staff required for their operating season with unknown funding acceptance restricting the ability to provide long-term staff security. Unknown short-term funding acceptance can limit staff contracts and early hiring times to stay competitive in the Whistler staffing market.



Grants/Grants in Aid

Grants or Grants In Aid are typically awarded for specific projects and awarded to applicants by a variety of local, regional, provincial or federal government agencies or through programs administered by a range of non-government organizations or charitable giving by corporations.

Process

- Typically requires an application process by which non-profits describe their proposed activity or project and compete for a limited pot of funds.

Limitations

- Number of applicants can usually greatly exceed amount of funding available at any given time. Can result in many positive and planned projects not being able to move forward given the demand for funding versus the amount available.

Club Membership Fees

The primary mechanism for many trail-focused non-profit clubs and groups to raise funds is through membership fees. Generally perceived value in a membership is derived from the benefits people obtain through being a part of a club, including events (races, social activities, instruction), advocacy for their activity, and stewardship of the trail resources they use.

Process

- Yearly individual, family or corporate membership drives to encourage individuals or companies to support club activities and administration.

Limitations

- Membership fees also required to support other club activities and administration, cannot allocate all fees to trail related activities.
- Can be subject to the levels of community engagement and can fluctuate year to year depending on many outside factors. In 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 Pandemic, Whistler residents lost work and jobs and as such did not have money to necessarily stay current on membership, which resulted in significant declines in membership numbers and related income from that stream for clubs like WORCA.

Trail Supporter Programs

Many local trail organizations and mountain bike clubs employ some form of Trail Supporter program. The trail support program encourages individuals to donate to the trails organization if they're just visiting the trail network and a club membership is too much investment for a limited amount of trail use in a region. Typically, the trail supporter program is aimed at visitors to an area or as a way for members to increase or enhance their support directly for trails.

Process

- Purchase a supporter pass, sticker, t-shirt, or similar item to show your appreciation and/or support of the local groups maintaining trails.
- Some clubs (WORCA) have advanced this to also include "super supporter" options at a higher rate with support of companies offering enhanced benefits for the higher rate.



Limitations

- Administration costs can sometimes take away from the revenue generated from the program.
- Can require participation of local businesses to sell on behalf of local organizations.

Volunteer Work

Volunteerism is an important part of many local club's trail building and maintenance activities. The ACC-Whistler section relied primarily on the efforts of a small group of dedicated volunteers to construct and maintain the Skywalk network, and the same is true for 99 Trials and WORCA for their ongoing trail maintenance and building programs. WORCA's weekly trail nights throughout the year have contributed significantly to new trail construction in the Whistler Valley on Lord of the Squirrels, Chipmunk Rebellion, and the Far Out/Flashback project, in addition to many other smaller reroute projects throughout the valley.

The efforts of all the local clubs have contributed many thousands of volunteer hours to trail development and maintenance over the previous decades. Additionally, event promoters such as the Coast Mountain Running series have contributed efforts to the network through partnering with WORCA to complete work on the Jane Lakes network through a commitment for their racers to participate in pre-event trail work, in addition to the promoter's teams completing work brushing existing trails that had become overgrown. Local school groups have also participated in trail work in the Whistler valley on a yearly basis with WORCA over the years, helping complete significant reroutes and updates to the network, especially in the Cut Yer Bars area close to their schools.

In some other jurisdictions, such as North Vancouver, the North Shore Mountain Bike Association has also had success in gaining corporate support of specific trails in which those companies also bring their staff to complete trail days under the guidance of the Club's paid crew.

Process

- Generally, requires varying levels of administration and organization to find or gain approval for suitable projects.
- Larger projects require skilled builders and maintainers to layout trail, prepare work sites, and manage groups that have varying levels of experience.

Limitations

- Can take time for organizations to learn the limitations, how to select appropriate projects, and learn the best approaches for managing groups of varying sizes for suitable projects.
- Access to trail sites that require work can be challenging and take up more time than is available for evening activities.
- Suitable projects for large groups can take time to gain approval, layout, and organization.
- Can be challenging to convince members that they are capable of the work.
- Weather on the date of the event can dissuade participation.
- Many trail maintenance activities can be skilled in nature and not necessarily suitable for unexperienced volunteers. Projects that leverage the volume of helpers to complete big tasks like corridor clearing, grubbing, and rock gathering, along with easy access to the site prove much more suited to large groups, although they still require many experienced builders to oversee and manage the effort.



Commercial (Guides, Events, etc) and Operator Support (Bike rentals per rider fee)

Commercial operations can be a great asset in providing not only financial support to the trail network but also can provide education, help manage behavior, assist in monitoring. Guides and instructors provide permit fees and events such as the Crankworx/Enduro World Series agree to pay fees to compensate their impacts from using the trail network. This can be used for pre-event trail preparation, post event restoration and maintenance reserve funds. WORCA facilitates this on WORCA maintained trails, Whistler Blackcomb control their CRA and the RMOW handle operations on municipal land such as Lost Lake (see Section 2.9). This pay for use system allows the trails to be maintained when trails experience more than average use and impacts due to events and can help provide preventative maintenance and mitigative work.

Commercial Operator support is also a valuable way to help commercial business utilizing public amenities to provide support to the trail network. For example, Arbutus Routes donates 2% of their profits from their bike tours and branded merchandise to local trail associations. Local business owners often provide other kinds of trail community support in form of donations and volunteers in the form of WORCA trail nights or Toonie event sponsorship.

Process

- Commercial event operators provide fees for trail use (see Section 2.9),
- Operators provide support as a per rider (rental or guide) cost
- Business owners and operators support club organized events (toonies, trail nights)
- Community donations
- Developer Community Amenity Contributions

Limitations

- Can require considerable club time to organize and operate
- Events can close trails to the community and create greater than average wear on trails in turn requiring more maintenance in the form of time and money than is supplied by restoration commitment/funds in agreements.
- Commercial business could believe paying for access entitles them to access above general public use or direction of where financial support goes.

Fundraising

Many groups also employ various fundraising schemes as methods to raise money beyond their typical revenue streams. These types of activities take the form of a range of approaches such as GoFundMe, special events, and draws/raffles. Community donations can also take the form of personal fundraising on behalf of local clubs, for example a fundraiser by Karsten Madsen attempting to “Everest” Lord of Squirrels raised money on behalf of WORCA. Residential developers have also been known to cover the costs to formally establish and construct new trails on their private property to compensate for impacts to existing trails elsewhere on their property.

Process

- GoFundMe type fundraisers related to specific projects.
- Special events put on by a trail organization with profits supporting trail related activities.
- Draws or Raffles for draw prizes typically donated by companies or local businesses
- Personal fundraisers on behalf of trail groups to generate funds and raise awareness.

Limitations



- Projects must be highly anticipated by the community and generate excitement at the prospect of helping fund a new trail
- Special events must appeal to a range of users but can also require significant club resources and administration to put on. Corporate sponsorship can help defray some of those costs, but it is not a guarantee.
- Prizes for draws or raffles must appeal to a wide range of potential participants. While some clubs have had extensive success with things like bikes donated by companies, they have also proven challenging and not as successful as anticipated in the past. The general public can prove fickle at times and results may not be as anticipated.
- Personal fundraisers can be limited by the reach of the people completing them, and the receptiveness of the public. They generally do not cost clubs anything in terms of supporting them however.
- Typically, more successful when seen to be supporting new trails rather than maintenance and repair of existing trails

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