

MT. ABRIEL TRAIL NETWORK

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS



NAKUSP | Photo: Mitch Winton

The mountain bike trail system in British Columbia sprawls across scenic landscapes, historic routes, and mountain peaks. Though the trails are well-maintained, some groups— including people with disabilities or special needs— might have challenges using them.

In the Kootenay Rockies region, an initiative led by the Nakusp Bike Society, and funded by the Province of B.C.'s Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program, has prioritized the development of accessible trails to the top of Mt. Abriel Trail, a mountain biking hub located eight kilometres from Nakusp. The Society further championed upgrades to the network's parking lot, picnic shelter, and camping areas, with an eye towards opening the area to a wider audience.



NAKUSP | Photo: Dave Heath

PROJECT CONSIDERATIONS

The Mt. Abriel Trail Network is located in a remote area. Gathering input from locals during the planning process remained a major point of focus throughout the project—internet connectivity is sporadic in some areas, which meant information sharing or asking for feedback often needed to happen in person.

Another area of focus was building community support for a project intended to bring more visitors to the area. While many people supported a boost in visitation, others were reluctant to welcome a larger influx of visitors.

Finally, all work on the trails needed to respect the environment, which meant conducting reviews, studies, and analyses to identify any cultural, historical, or environmental considerations.

PROJECT APPROACH

The Society ensured residents, businesses, and groups were presented multiple opportunities, through various mediums, to provide feedback on the improved trail network. They also shared information on economic, and other, benefits of an improved network, encouraging residents to warm to the idea of a boost in tourism to the area.

The Society hired local companies and workers to build the trail and associated elements. By supporting the local economy, as well as minimizing environmental impact, the team ensured the community benefitted not only from the improved and enhanced experience, but also the process of developing it—a key element of destination development.



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

This project demonstrates that destination development can benefit communities as well as the economy—and why it's essential to listen to community feedback when developing a new tourism offering.

Also, building equity in tourism activities makes good business sense. Destination development can help more visitors—including people from equity-deserving groups—feel welcomed to a destination.

Ultimately, the Mt. Abriel Trail Network project was a massive undertaking for a small community, and staffed mainly by volunteers. Its successful implementation is largely due to efforts by the Nakusp Bike Society to maintain open communication and prioritize community feedback throughout every stage of the process.

