

Wednesday August 31, 2022

To Fish Lake area planning committee,

I've loved the hikes we've done here. The trail up to the ridge over the Bonneville Lakes, Knuckle Ridge, Fish Creek, Mount Sumanik, Mount McIntyre are all places we hike and snowshoe, generally with friends.

There's discussion about trails getting braided with increasing use. Trails often need maintenance. The Bonneville Lakes Ridge hike is a great example. People end up taking lots of side trails because sometimes this traditional route becomes a creek or muddy or they're looking for better footing. The best time to use it is often in the winter when it can be like a sidewalk!

Often trails get built and as people use the trail, they find it lacking in things like good views, or the trail having difficult sections.

I helped Reckless Raven to route their race through some of the area's spectacular high landscape. One goal was to flag a route so that the area developed fewer braided trails. We see Mount Sumanik from all over town. Walking the ridge will be a desired hike and will get more people walking. Current improvements to the Haeckel Hill road for the new wind towers will certainly allow more people into this spectacular area.

The race only goes up and along Knuckle Ridge. But as a hike, returning down through the horse trails can be a wet adventure. A boardwalk along the wet upper valley section will make this a great loop.

Traveling and walking in other places, other countries, one sees that well built trails, well designed trail systems are a real pleasure, and they can last a very long time. Some are truly works of art. An advantage of a great trail is that it can help corral use; and a good network will encourage people to not develop more random trails.

Whitehorsetwalks.com

Whitehorsetwalks is my on-line walking advocacy website. I try to get more people out walking in nature, to instill a love of walking, and I lobby for better walking conditions. If people spent more time in nature, things would be better.

I like to explore, to get to places that have that sense of natural awe. I look for neat loop walks/hikes that might entice people. I maintain a large planning/trail database in Google Earth, mostly on the Whitehorse area. The Knuckle Ridge hike, listed in the background study bibliography, is an example of creating a loop

walk by linking pieces of existing trails and roads, and then looking how to make it better.

One focus of the whitehorsetwalks project is neighbourhood trails and street/sidewalk walking. I track project proposals and look at them from the point of view of a walker. Will the project hinder walking? Are there opportunities to improve walking? I look at City of Whitehorse (COW) initiatives, and sometimes Yukon Government. Often my feedback is common sense walkability observations.

As a result of finding myself repeating walking arguments (Why is walking good, health benefits, societal benefits, etc.), I wrote a booklet called *Yukon Walking Strategy*. It's on whitehorsetwalks. One topic yet to add is walking for seniors, for elders. As a 74-year-old avid walker, I have a lot of ideas!

Another really important topic still to write for the strategy is around walking and first nations. I've lots of thoughts but I've not written this section because I don't want to say "First Nations should..." Perhaps a FN walker would like to help out here. I think that walking trails could be an important building block for kid development.

Trails as an educational tool

KDFN (and YG) are asking for feedback on the Fish Lake background study, for ideas that might be relevant. It's important that what's proposed works to help KDFN develop capacity within their community. For instance, the infrastructure of lands work ideally has FN people throughout, especially in the technical side. These are good skills for a land-based culture.

To me, *Together today for our children tomorrow* implies that advantaging kids is an important concept in thoughts on land use. As I said above, trails could be a useful tool in providing a meaningful, outdoor activity that could give a sense of pride and purpose. It could be true to traditional land values, and yet accommodate today's increasing screen-based lives, and possibly help in the battle with addictions.

I think that having trails as a strong thread in schools will help kids be interested in school, similar to the experiential science and MAD programs, a stay-in-school concept.

This is even more relevant with the new First Nation school boards. There are aspects of local curriculum aids that could also be developed, such as Paddy's Pond, a booklet I created a few years ago with Diane Smith

A few years ago, Yukon College was looking for direction on their lands and programming. I suggested that there needs to be a thread in Yukon schools that has an strong outdoor focus. A focus on trails: maintenance, designing, expanding, generally building quality trails. It could touch on engineering, math, construction. Then skills involved in interpreting — clear writing, communications, biology, geology, biology, botany, computer mapping and publishing, and other appropriate academic concepts. This would have been within the entire Yukon educational system and been supported by the College at the top.

This trails thread would be like ‘Singletrack to success,’ with an academic component. One change is it would focus on walking trails, rather than just mountain biking. Why? There’s much more need for walking trails and they go to many more places than trails designed for mountain bikes. Virtually every single community has their own walks, many that might need maintenance or some sort of trail infrastructure such as a boardwalk or a bridge or a switchback or benches.

Accessible trails built using crushed gravel rather than pavement would allow community innovation that would work without large roadwork-scale companies.

Trail initiatives would be able to access community development funding, perhaps as a summer employment initiative similar to the Y2C2 program.

As the Yukon grows, and in particular Whitehorse itself, I see an incredible shortage of trail work abilities. We seem to be able to make new trails but not to improve the old ones. Certainly COW can’t even begin to keep up with needs.

Looking outside the Whitehorse area there are many places where trail work is needed. International Falls is one example where a better start to the trail would be amazing.

We spend a large amount of money on tourism and often tourists just pass through. YG could designate more budget to highway amenities such as trails. As I mentioned in my walking strategy, every highway pull-off, every campground should have some sort of walk, even if a short one.

It is important to understand that this is not suggesting that trail worker would be a job for life for the students, rather it’s the chance to see that the things they would be exposed to in trails-based education courses. They could be well equipped to pursue modern jobs, maybe especially land-based jobs. Scientists, technicians, artists, business people, engineering, politicians, the list goes on.

Land use and population growth

People will always want to live in the Yukon, especially around Whitehorse. Recent COW studies have identified two areas for growth that could

accommodate 26,000 people. My feeling is using the Fish Lake area for nature and recreation would help the COW to build denser, to not just keep spreading out. Turning the area into country residential or cottage lots will be popular but likely is not the best use of this area.

The Background Plan talks about what direction area planning should take. Certainly trails-based initiatives would lessen the stresses in the area; walking trails in particular have less impact than other uses. This would also allow KDFN citizens to point with pride to trails their members have built.

I understand there may be tax implications that could come depending on the class of lands, but I’d rather see some of this area designated as park. I’m guessing that use of the land for hunting as an example might be a complication.

Trails

As we look to the future, it’s important to look to the past. As the report’s map #1 shows, many trails in the past connected places and peoples. Trails used to connect to people and places like good hunting, fishing, berries, habitation.

“From summer salmon camps above Kwanlin (Miles Canyon) and Lür Däyhèl (Takhini River at the mouth of the Little River), many trails led to Fish Lake. Old foot trails branch out from the lake in all directions: west to the Bonneville Lakes and Ibex Valley; southwest to Primrose and Rose (Mud) Lakes; south to Alligator Lake; and southeast to Coal Lake and Robinson. Most of these trails were used to travel from one camp to another and associated with hunting routes and traplines. There were also extensive trail systems connecting Fish Lake to Champagne, Lake Laberge, Marsh Lake and points beyond.”

Nowadays trails also get used for recreation and for physical fitness.

Trails should be designated early on in processes. Existing or previous routes are often chosen for their practicality. However today’s development often ignores trails and considers trails something that could be added after the roads and homes are built. Often the natural trail flow is no longer possible. So walkable connections are less than optimal.

Walking

On the next page is a quick overview of walking possibilities. KDFN has many pieces of land around Whitehorse, and thus, many opportunities to influence at walking dynamic. Another great area opportunity is a Yukon River Trail connection on the east side of the river from the blue Lewes River Bridge to the city limits.

Peter



Who should lobby for walking?

I feel governments need to have a high up person on staff who looks at every planning situation and thinks what is good for walking and what could hurt walking. I think KDFN would be well served to have such a person.

Who does trail work?

Think of creating and maintaining a trail network over a vast area such as Fish Lake or the Yukon River or Long Lake - Magnusson - Grey Mountain - Hidden Lakes - Chadburn Lake. Clearly, some aspects of community participation are needed.

- Montana Mountain's Singletrack to Success project is a step in the right direction. Making cool bike trails engages youth.
- Rob Horne's project with the Youth Achievement Centre's Dream Trail is another winner.
- Gary Baillie's Kwanlin Coyotes
- Gary B. and Joey's ski trail is the community at work
- CMBC working on trail upkeep is impressive
- grooming that Fat Tire biking folk do on trails behind the hospital is a great addition to winter walking
- long-term vision of trail work; teams, summer jobs, self-employment
- underpins a broad need for trails
- Dirt Girls' Pink Trail and their rides
- KSA works on the motorized trail network

Why focus on walking?

There's a great need for walking trails.

- see also [Yukon Walking Strategy](#)
- much community satisfaction in having good walking trails
- very few trails with wheelchairs, baby strollers in mind
- every community, every subdivision wants walking trails, that they can get to with a short walk
- making specific-use trails is too limiting; far more walkers than other users; walking trails are good for most uses
- traditional trails were walking, soft land use
- opportunity to be part of [National Hiking Trail](#)

Governments

Keeping up with trail work is obviously well beyond most government abilities and resources.

- they do provide big and small grants: community development grants, active transportation, Youth Roots Grant
- grants are generally accessible by associations: CMBC, KSA, runners, skiers. (There's no walking association.)
- land is a major First Nation focus
- COW says 800 km of trails with many others not on their maps

What needs doing?

- maintaining trails, improving sections, making necessary connectors, dreaming up new destinations, assessing status.

- can include standard accessible crushed gravel paths
- can involve bridges, boardwalks, staircases, lookout platforms; opportunities to devise simple, inexpensive methods
- mapping, major signage, on-trail trail waymarking
- trail huts
- leading hikes, patrolling, safety

Interpretation better the trail experience

- plant identification, birding, animal knowledge,
- weather, geology, geography, glaciation, glacial melting
- ecology of the land, drought, flooding, fire
- ecoregions
- historical First Nation land use over the millennia
- recent history
- curriculum aids like [Paddy's Pond](#)

Land-based educational opportunities

- First Nation values abound in trails
- pride in being part of the land
- pass on values to future generations
- in the past, walking was a part of life
- adapt learning methods for outdoor skills: MAD, experiential science, Y2C2, Singletrack to Success, Youth Achievement Centre
- post-secondary education: botany, biology, geology, language, computers, history are some skills involved in creating, maintaining, upgrading and interpreting quality walking trail networks
- form the basis of a broad, practical education, and a lifetime love of the outdoors and walking

Reading

(Find and read: Hoepfner & Associates, and Yukon. Dept of Ed. *You Make the Difference: Stay in School Initiative Study*. Whitehorse, Yukon: Yukon Education, 1992. Loc: PAM 1992-0498)

Keith Halliday article on trails. <https://www.yukon-news.com/opinion/yukonomist-summer-trails/>

Lawrie Crawford's article on youth: <https://www.yukon-news.com/news/youth-panelists-discuss-yukons-culture-of-substance-use/>

Viewing Whitehorse from Above. A guide to Haeckel Hill • Thay T'aw, https://www.whitehorsetwalks.com/_docs/haeckelEng.pdf

Paddy's Pond, a neighbourhood resource, Lessons in the Bush • Kwät ta Këts'adan, <http://www.yukonviews.com/yukon/flowers/paddyPond/index.html>