

Above-the-airport walking and snowshoeing trails

IN THE MOUNT MCINTYRE RECREATION AREA OF WHITEHORSE

Over the past few years, the City's Parks and Trails people have built a number of hiking and mountain biking trails in the Mount McIntyre recreational area.

Recently, the City and the Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Club (WCCSC) negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for these trails. It appropriately gives the club say over trails within the club's network.

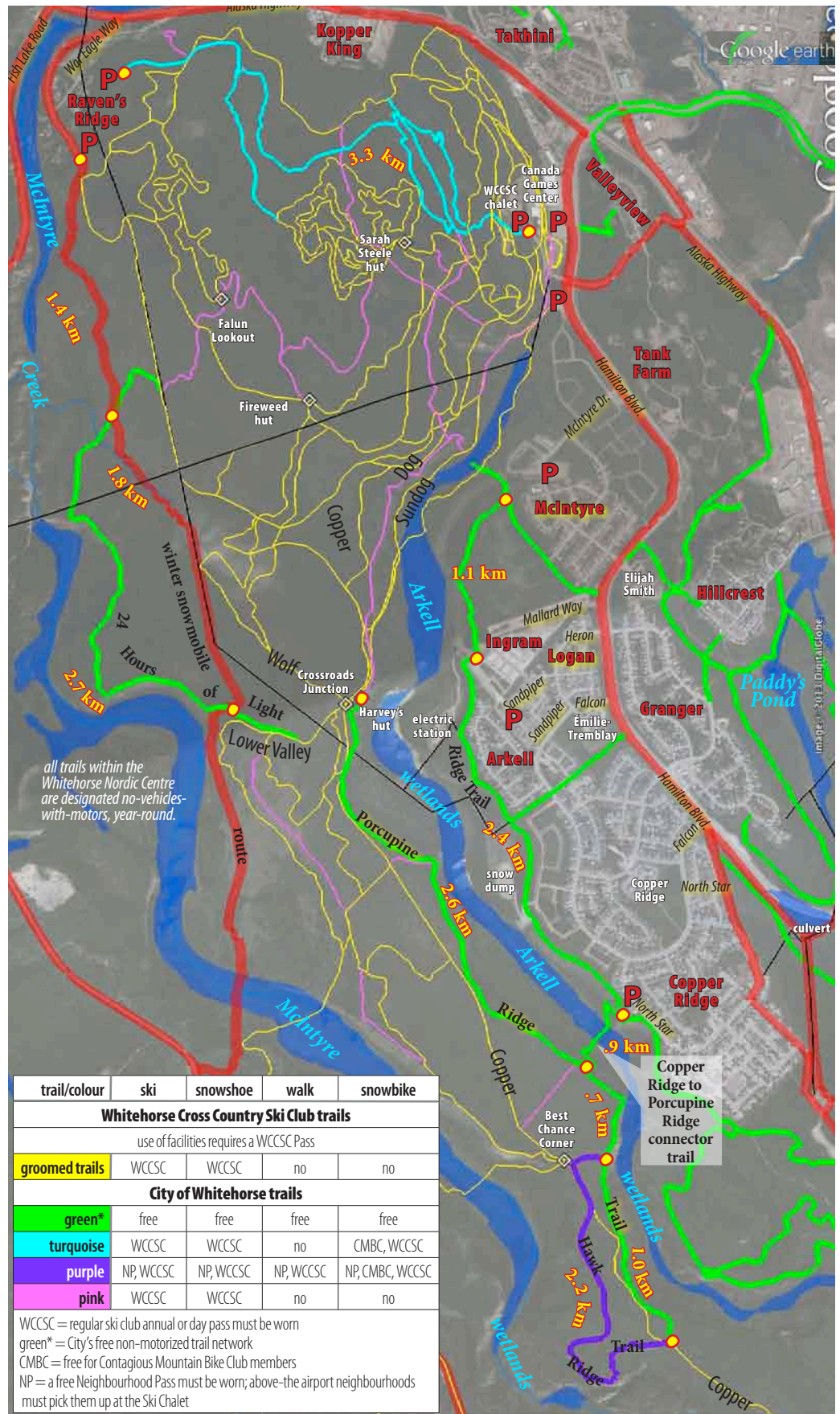
The club has concerns over dogs, damage while crossing groomed ski trails, insurance risks, and non-members using club facilities, such as the chalet. The map (right) shows the new rules. People can freely use City trails on the edges (green trails) of club trails.

Now, with this agreement, very little work is needed to merge a neighbourhood trail vision with a strong, long-standing skiing vision, and still protect club interests.

This work would include small changes to items already in the MoU, as well some places requiring trail work:

- Focus on solutions—preventing trail damage, ensuring skier safety on trails, paying if using club facilities, club dog rules—rather than restricting use of City trails.
- Ensure benefits from new trails apply to all residents fairly.
- Simplify trail categories to make less complex rules, both for residents to follow and the ski club to administer and enforce.
- Examine all trail crossings to ensure people crossing groomed trails cannot damage them, nor cause safety problems; harden the crossings and create bypass trails if necessary.
- Educate users, putting signs at trailheads and crossings to emphasize rules and etiquette for crossing groomed trails.
- Allow a crossing at Crossroads Junction.
- Create trail pieces for the proposed 24 Hours of Light to the Arkell Connector Trail.
- Revitalize and integrate above-the-airport trails and greenspaces committee into processes.

Read on to see what could be created with a little bit of extra trail work by the City and a recognition that neighbourhood growth here has been huge in the years since the ski club started.



trail/colour	ski	snowshoe	walk	snowbike
Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Club trails				
use of facilities requires a WCCSC Pass				
groomed trails	WCCSC	WCCSC	no	no
City of Whitehorse trails				
green*	free	free	free	free
turquoise	WCCSC	WCCSC	no	CMBC, WCCSC
purple	NP, WCCSC	NP, WCCSC	NP, WCCSC	NP, CMBC, WCCSC
pink	WCCSC	WCCSC	no	no

WCCSC = regular ski club annual or day pass must be worn
 green* = City's free non-motorized trail network
 CMBC = free for Contagious Mountain Bike Club members
 NP = a free Neighbourhood Pass must be worn; above-the-airport neighbourhoods must pick them up at the Ski Chalet

red = motorized and/or snowmobile trails; black = powerlines; smaller residential trails hidden for clarity; please don't walk or snowshoe on groomed ski trails; map and rules draft until final MoU published.

The MoU calls for consultation over the winter; the parties will discuss the issues in May—however, there's few community associations above the airport, and no walking or snowshoeing groups. This document is to provoke discussion, to think about what people want for their neighbourhood: a scattering of trails or a walkable network connecting throughout the Mount McIntyre recreation area.

These new trails were built as part of the City trail infrastructure. They will be maintained by the City and, because they are not ski club trails, won't require grooming. These new taxpayer-paid trails require simple logical rules. The ski club will benefit as more people will be exposed to ski trails, and general ski club camaraderie. Simpler rules would mean less work for the ski club.

Presently, above-the-airport residents must pick up and wear a free Neighbourhood Pass if they wish to cross the club's groomed Copper Trail and walk or snowshoe on the City's Hawk Ridge Trail. The pass is to ensure people know to not damage the club's groomed trails.

Enforcing the Neighbourhood Pass could be difficult. People often like to visit other neighbourhoods to use other trails. When rules are complicated, or seem unfair, an honour system may fail. Better solutions are signage and trail crossings built so problems can't arise.

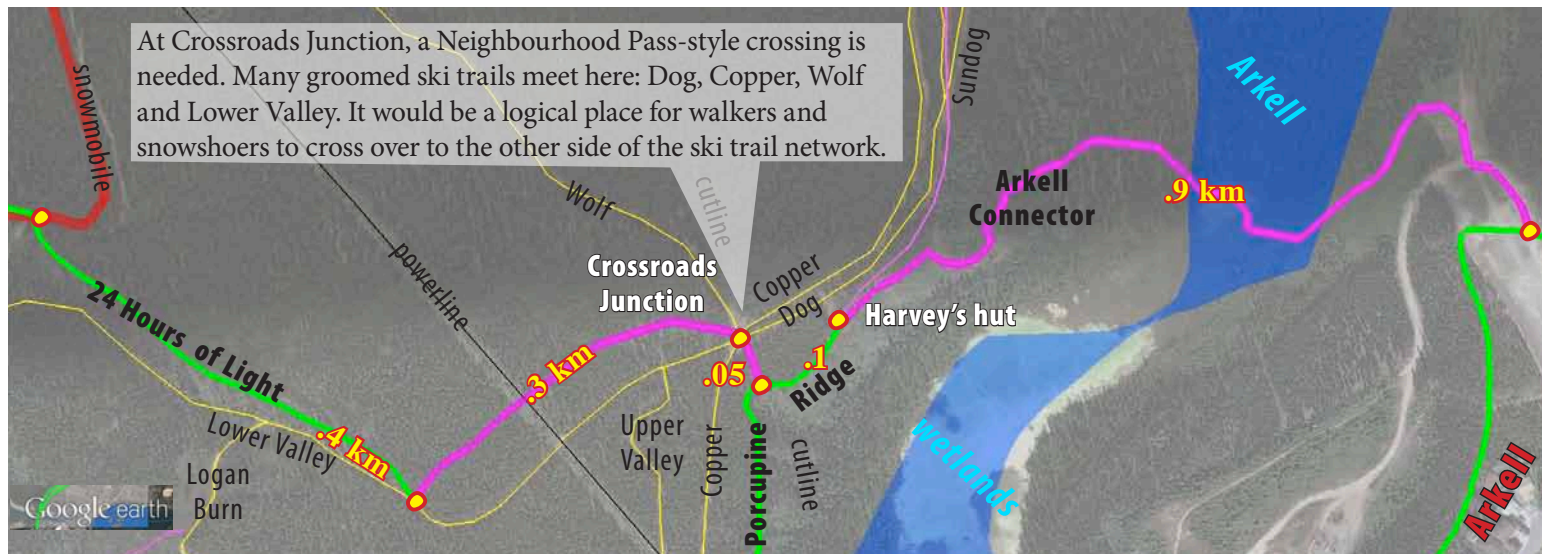
Using proposed hikes*, here's ideas for even better trail experiences from a walking-snowshoeing-neighbourhood point of view.

Ski Chalet-Raven's Ridge (turquoise trails)

The City's turquoise trails makes an ideal snowshoeing network. An agreement between the City, WCCSC and CMBC allows CMBC members to snowbike these trails for free, yet to use these trails, snowshoers must pay regular club ski rates and wear a ski club pass. Snowshoeing here should be part of the MoU's exemptions.

For Raven's Ridge residents, this is virtually in their backyard. Other close neighbours to these trails include Takhini and Valleyview. One day it will also include the Tank Farm. My guess is no dogs are allowed.

Here's a 1–1.5 hour, 3.3-km trail (shown in orange below). Park one vehicle near the ski chalet and snowshoe to the shuttle vehicle parked at the Raven's Ridge subdivision. Follow Rocky Canyon, then Upper Rocky Canyon, Fetish, Two Burnt Trees and come out at Raven's Ridge on Bouncing Bunny.



24 Hours of Light to Arkell Connector Trail

This 1.8 km, ~2 hour return, proposed route goes from Arkell, across the wetlands, up the bluff by Harvey's hut. It ends where the 24 Hours of Light Trail intersects the snowmobile route with a view looking over McIntyre Creek. See the next page for hikes with this route. Note: Wolf and Copper above Harvey's hut are not for dogs.

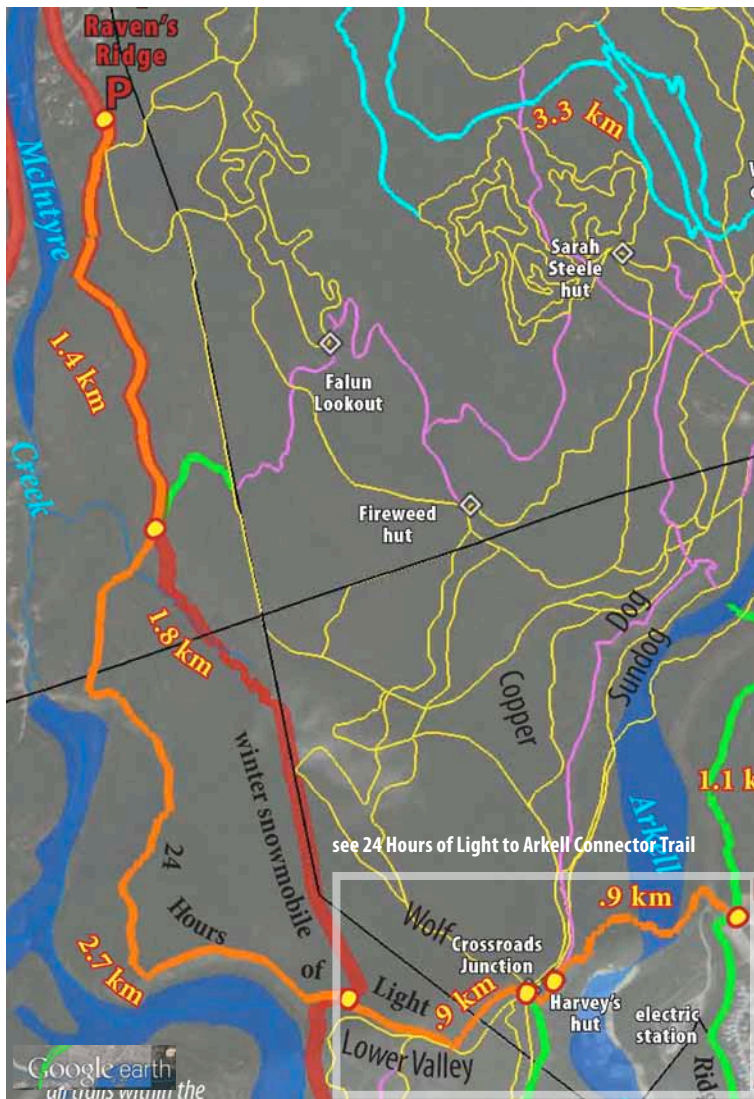
People have walked and snowshoed the proposed Arkell Connector (9-km; thick pink line) to Harvey's hut from Arkell-Ingram. Down on the flat, the trail crosses a wetland* so be attentive for overflow in warmer weather or after a lot of snow. After the wetland, there is a lovely bit of trail up through the forested slope. After the steepest part of the hill, the route comes out at the top of the slope near Dog Trail.

Next, take the Porcupine Ridge Trail past Harvey's hut, for about 100 m until the trail intersects with a cutline. Turn right and follow the cutline for about 50 m to Crossroads Junction. Be mindful when crossing. Re-enter the woods between Valley and Wolf trails, going behind the sign.

Finally, a piece of new trail is needed between Crossroads Junction and the 24 Hours of Light Trail (thick pink line; about .3 km). This would keep users well away from the Lower Valley groomed trail.

*This presentation was partly inspired by a recent YCS – Friends of McIntyre Creek project to encourage more understanding of the middle McIntyre Creek area by choosing four walking trails.

**Blue water on map above is to only to show concept of wetlands.



24 Hours of Light Hike

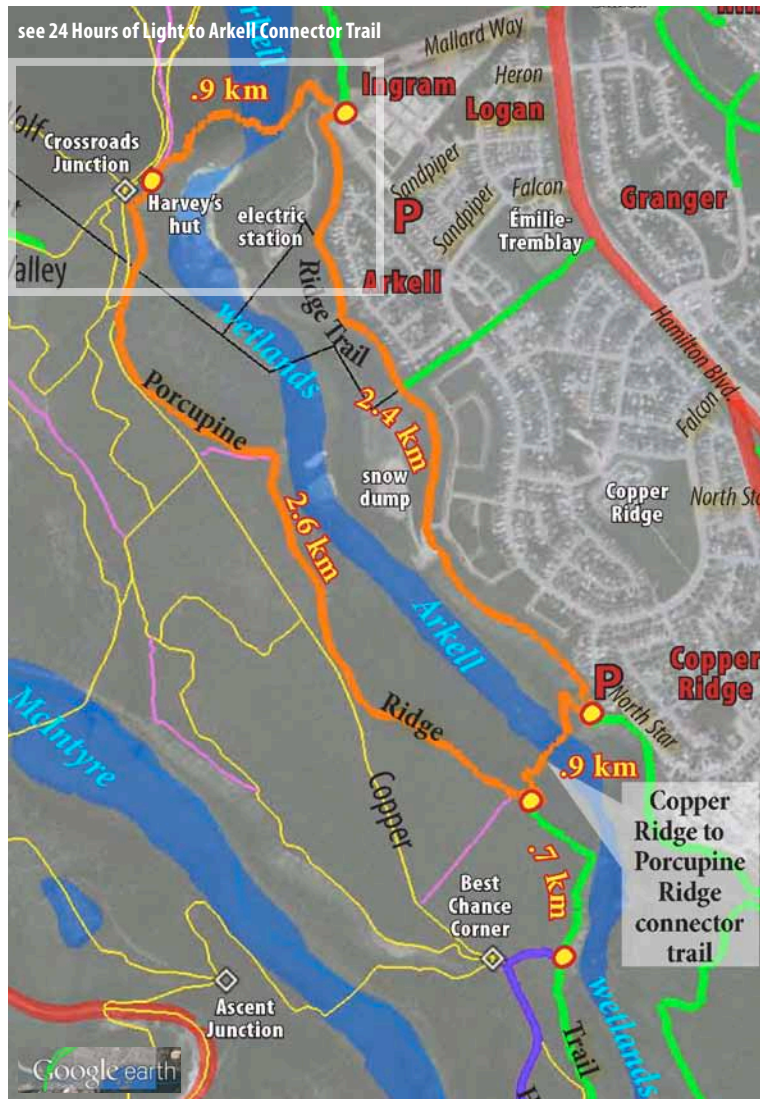
This proposed, hike (shown in orange above), is about 6 km or 2.5 hours, and offers great views along McIntyre Creek as it follows the edge of the bluffs. It requires a shuttle vehicle at each end.

At first, the trail starting at Raven's Ridge uses the winter-only snowmobile trail. Trail conditions on the motorized part of the route will vary depending on amount of snowmobile traffic.

The 24 Hours of Light Trail, also a neighbourhood trail for the small group of people living in Raven's Ridge, is not always well used. After winds and snow, it can be tricky to find the trailhead. Once on the trail, careful observations will reveal the route, especially through the woods. Wayfinding signs will help.

About 400 m after crossing the snowmobile trail, the 24 Hours of Light ends. The route would then follow the proposed 24 Hours of Light to Arkell Connector Trail for about 1.8 km to Arkell. Follow club dog rules as you pass through Connection Junction.

To hike without a shuttle vehicle, turn around near the end of the 24 Hours of Light Trail and follow the same trail back to enjoy the view looking the other way along the creek. Alternately, when intersecting the snowmobile route, turn left and follow the snowmobile trail back to the start.



Porcupine Ridge Hike

This almost 7-km, 2.5 hour, dog friendly, proposed loop trail (shown in orange above) is a reflection of how spread out the neighbourhoods are that back onto the wetlands.

At the start of the new connector trail, there is a steep slippery descent—be careful if you are less sure of foot. The boardwalk at the bottom of the new connector trail would be an interesting place to establish an interpreted wetland trail.

At the Harvey's hut end, follow the proposed 24 Hours of Light to Arkell Connector Trail down into the wetlands. At some place where the connector crosses the wetlands would be a good spot for an all-season wetland crossing. An all-season link to the McIntyre subdivision would also be popular.

In today's busy world, people need alternatives to get their daily exercise. Thus, a shorter hike would be to leave shuttle vehicles at the end points: one at North Star in Copper Ridge, the other on Sandpiper in Arkell. The hike is then about 5 km or two hours.

In the winter, even shorter routes would involve following the powerline down hill and crossing over the frozen wetlands. Options then involve various routes back up to the streets. One way leads through the snow dump and up the slope there.

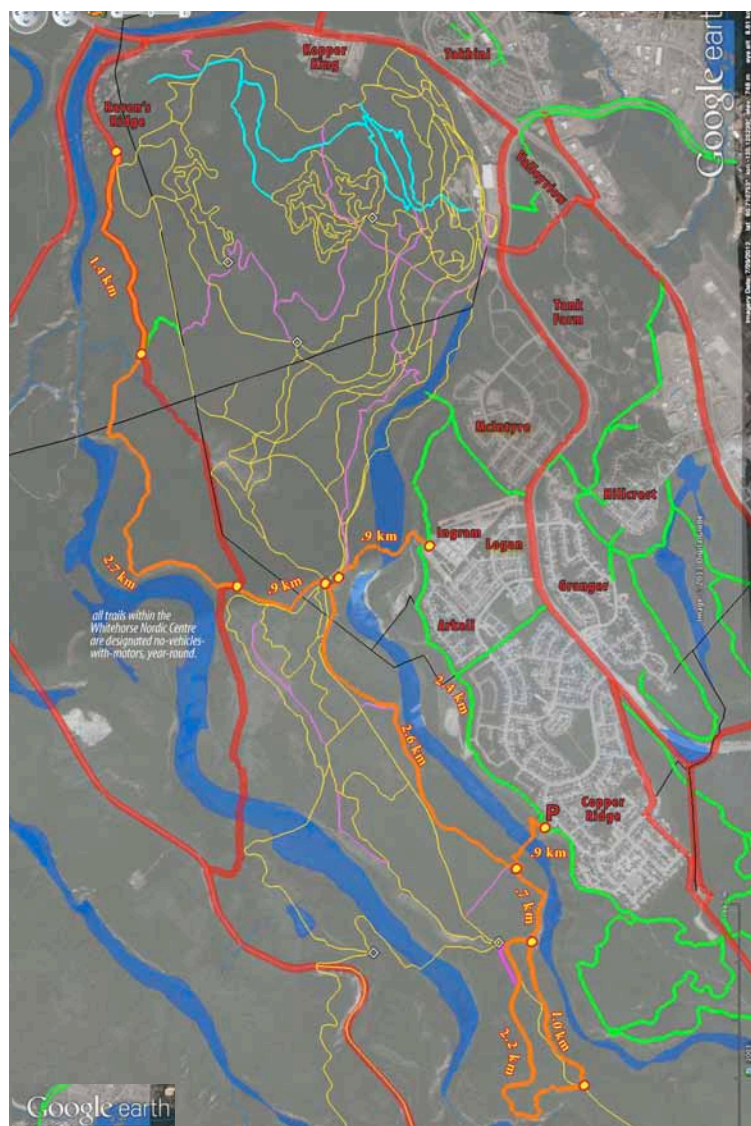
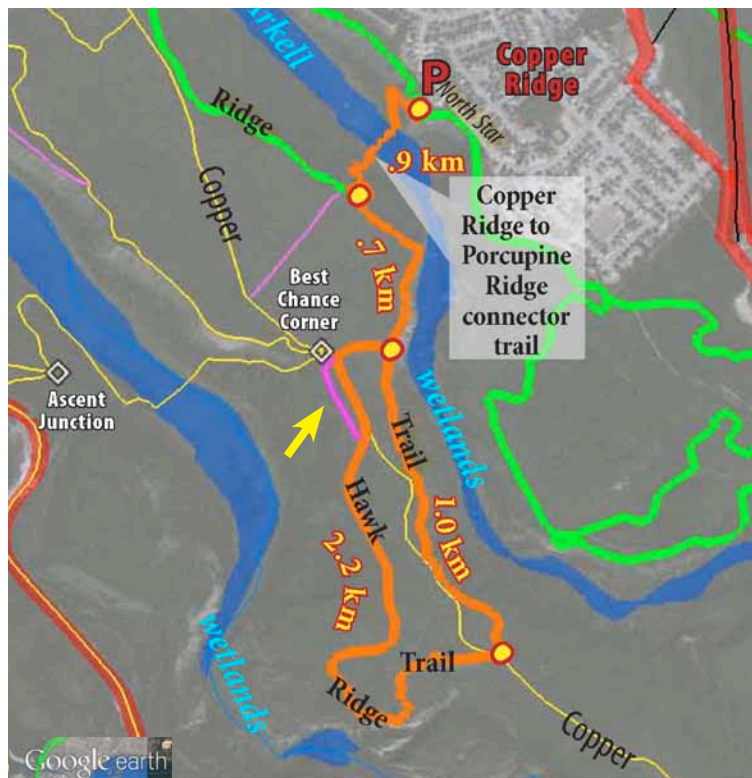
Hawk Ridge Hike

This proposed, dog friendly, hike (shown on right in orange) is about 6.4 km or 2.5 hours*. The trail has nice views into both the Arkell and McIntyre wetlands. With its old cabins from the early copper mining days, interesting rock formations and the old mining operations, the area calls out for being interpreted.

Easy side trails bring you out above a series of beaver dams, with a view across to an old road descending from the Copper Haul road. (Could an all-season trail cross over to the Copper Haul road in this area?)

Use of the Hawk Ridge Trail part of this route requires a Neighbourhood Pass. An improvement here would be to cut a bypass trail from Best Chance Corner (see the thick pink line; about .3 km). This would ensure walkers and snowshoers can keep well away from the groomed Copper Trail.

**Times shown for trails vary depending on fitness, season, footwear (snowshoes or boots), snow depth, frequency of trail use: think 2-3 km/hr for snowshoeing, while 4-5 km/hr is more realistic for summer walking. Winter walking times are used in this document. Distances are approximate.*



To wrap this up, there are now about 7000 people living above the airport; growth is continuing, both through infill, and future development of the Tank Farm and Beyond Copper Ridge.

Decades of urban development, large wetlands in the summer and ski club trail use in the winter had resulted in a lack of good, all-season ‘wilderness’ trails. Hiking was challenging, with little easily accessible variety. Neighbourhood walkability was low.

However, the new City trails have opened up great recreational opportunities for above-the-airport residents. The Copper Ridge to Porcupine Ridge Connector Trail tamed the old treacherous wetland crossing and has become a gateway to neighbourhood recreation.

Walking could become a regular neighbourhood activity — a big plus for community wellness.

As with Riverdale’s Hidden–Chadden–Chadburn lakes area and Takhini–Porter Creek’s McIntyre Creek area, this network of trails will become a prized neighbourhood asset, a destination, much like the Millennium Trail and bridge are for Riverdale.

The trail work proposed in this document would complete a free, all-season City trail network (orange trails on map to the left) for neighbourhoods around the Mount McIntyre Recreation area. And it would honour the ski club’s need to protect its trails.

With work completed, a significant section of the larger City trail network would have been created, elegantly linking to the trail network chosen by the above-the-airport trail task force last fall.

Further steps would be to ensure Alaska Highway twinning project accounts for a link across the Alaska Highway by the Fish Lake Road and connecting to the middle McIntyre Creek trails.

Be sure to let the City, your community association and the ski club know what you think.