

Canada150 Infrastructure Program

April 26, 2016

I was asked to write a support letter for Yukon Parks' application for rehabilitating two campground trails.

*"Walkable neighbourhoods attract walkers like bird feeders attract songbirds. It's simple: people will walk if we create places and spaces where they want to walk. Unlike standalone promotional campaigns, improved walkability generates lasting increases in walking rates. It transforms behaviour."* Draft 2016 Canadian National Action Strategy for Walking

There is a lot of talk these days about walking for environmental, health, economic and social reasons. *Whitehorsetwalks.com* is my project to share my love of walking, to consolidate local walking information. By presenting the point of view of a northern, rural walker, I lobby for changes that encourage people to walk more.

Developing quality walking trails benefits not only ourselves, but also tourism. We have many tourists, often just passing through. These updated trails will encourage visitors to spend more time here in nature-based fitness activities — a stay-another day focus. The project fits very well with my Yukon Walking Strategy which proposes making the Yukon a walking destination, in part, by creating strong interpreted walking trails based out of campgrounds! Using Y2C2 youth crew as a key part of this project is a great idea.

Walking trails in the north are important since often people, locals and visitors alike, are somewhat fearful about wilderness — wildlife (bears!) and getting lost are a couple of aspects. Having well built, attractive, well interpreted destination trails can help encourage people to be more adventurous.

Having well-marked year-round walking trails is very important. Trails need much more than just an occasional signpost, but rather frequent medallion- or marker-style marking. Sometimes because of many intersecting trails. Especially in the winter, after a snowfall or on a windy day, trails can disappear in places. Popular, accessible trails, such as these campground trails would be, get used more frequently and are easier to follow, easier to walk.

Making these campground trails accessible is a fitting aspect of celebrating Canada's birthday. Keeping the Millennium Trail cleared this past winter proved that there are people who want to walk all year but need a more level surface to do so, users of wheelchairs, walkers, canes and some seniors. Also to consider in making the trail accessible is clearly showing points where people can turn back and not have to do the whole loop — say for families with little kids whose desires of doing all 5-6 km of the trail prove too ambitious. Another aspect is to have frequent rest spots: benches, rocks or stumps to lean against.

Integration into neighbouring trails is a key component, especially for the Wolf Creek Trail. There are a number of rural subdivisions very close to Wolf Creek and ensuring good trail connections with the Wolf Creek Trail is very important. As a popular regional trail, parking close to the trailhead in the campground, especially for winter access, should be considered as part of the upgrade for this destination trail.

With the objective of *"Giving back to Canada" - shaping the future, leaving a lasting legacy and giving a gift to Canada*, the revived, accessible, interpreted Wolf Creek Trail would become a key entrance into the south-side of a proposed Yukon River Trail. In the not so distant past, First Nation people used trails on both sides of the Yukon River between Marsh Lake and Lake Laberge. The ~15 km section between the VRC downtown and the major Wolf Creek Trail will be an important section of this long distance walk, particularly for active transportation.

The refurbished Wolf Creek Campground trail also has another role, grounding the City's newly created Wolf Creek Park. A future, extended Wolf Creek Trail, might connect existing pieces of trail as the creek descends from Golden Horn, through the Park, creating another exciting walking opportunity.

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