

My name is Peter Long. I'm part of the Hillcrest Community Association's Trails and Greenspaces committee.



There's talk about respect for the land, respect for the environment — leaving no lasting impression on the landscape, damage to fragile alpine and wetlands.

There's talk about staying on the trails.

There's talk about acting responsibly, best regulated by the individual.

There's talk about traditional yukon values, less regulations, fewer restrictions — the good old days.

But, times change. Since I moved to the Yukon over 30 years ago, Whitehorse has doubled its population.

Most of the discussion in the media seems to be about general Yukon-wide problems with off-road vehicles. It seems to me that people are ignoring off-road vehicles WITHIN our communities.

I want to focus on in-town usage — neighbourhood trails and greenspaces.

When I moved to Hillcrest in 1986, the only neighbourhoods above the airport were Hillcrest, Lobird and Valleyview. Since then, McIntyre, Granger, Logan, Arkell, Copper Ridge and Ingram have been built. And there's still more growth projected.

This has meant our greenspaces have become much smaller; we've lost the wide network of trails we used to use. And now, of the remaining neighbourhood trails, some important ones are being badly dug up by motor vehicles, basically rendered unusable. These days, there seems to be motor vehicle use on just about every trail, and some of them go pretty fast!

What can this committee's report recommend?

Off-road vehicles are just that: vehicles — and like cars and trucks, they need to be insured, registered and carry licence plates.

Drivers should pass tests. There needs to be a graduated licence system, much like we have for learning to drive a car. And there must be penalties for careless or reckless drivers.

It is critical that territorial laws give individual communities the right to legislate any off-road vehicle activity within their boundaries.

There's talk about fair use.

Perhaps there should be some trails that have no motor vehicle use at all.

Some people appreciate peace and quiet, small foot trails, clean air — they ski, snowshoe, but mostly they're walkers. Rising health care costs imply our governments need to be encouraging an active healthy population — more walkers, less driving! People on foot shouldn't have to drive somewhere to get trails without vehicle traffic.

We have to accept that times change. Every area within the city does not have to be accessible to off-road vehicles.

It really doesn't matter if people have "always" just done what they want in the woods. As our population continues to grow, the remaining greenspaces within our neighbourhoods are under constant pressure. Hillcrest is now within the City's Urban Containment Boundary. We want affordable development, higher density. The City will grow inwards, with less sprawl.

For the latest OCP, our Hillcrest Trails and Greenspaces Committee successfully had the Ice Lake/Paddy's Pond area designated as a city park. Wouldn't it be nice if we could be on the trails around Ice Lake and Paddy's Pond and get a "Yukon"-type experience, the sense of a spectacular peaceful wilderness. Instead we have churned up trails, beaten down wetlands, in places, a rather discouraging looking motor vehicle playground.

Barricades, signage and common respect don't seem to work. There's talk about education as a solution. There's talk about only a few irresponsible drivers causing problems.

So what else can this committee recommend? It could help by ensuring project funding to both neighbourhood committees and motor vehicle clubs that have specific goals of restoring a natural environment within our neighbourhood areas. It should not be to just build new trails.

People in the various off-road vehicle clubs such as the Klondike Snowmobile Association, Trails only Yukon Association, Yukon Off-road Riders Association should be part of this. After all, most of the off-road vehicle drivers live in our neighbourhoods; some must also walk the trails. They must see how some areas are getting trashed. We all have pride in our neighbourhood greenspaces. It can't get better if we don't all help.

The City's OCP talks about "out and away" trails that allow people to get away from local green spaces and into the larger hinterland. Motor vehicles can go farther much more easily than people on foot.

This committee could help by funding a full weekend workshop, with a professional facilitator, that focusses on city greenspaces — what should be the best motor vehicle trails and what should be non-motorized trails. The City should be a co-sponsor.

Trails that are critical for off-road vehicles are likely pretty obvious. Multi-use trails may well not be the best solution. Sharing a trail with fast moving vehicles is not necessarily the best solution.

The committee could recommend funding better mapping for our communities. Most computers have Google Earth and it's pretty easy to use. If we had all the land use designations and all the trail classifications on our own computers to examine before meetings, think of how productive they could be.

In closing, I think we should be just as concerned about the effects of off-road vehicles in our own neighbourhood greenspaces as in the greenspaces of animals!

These problems with off-road vehicles have been around for years. This committee should address this conflict and fix it fast and fairly. Let's make this a community-driven solution.

Thank you.