

Mount Richards Position Paper January 2023

Introduction

Mount Richards is located west of Crofton and provides a backdrop to the town. It is located in the Municipal Forest (MFR) of North Cowichan and comprises approximately 7 square kilometres. Hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians all use Mount Richards. The municipality has not built any trails, but there are over 12 kilometres of roads, many of which are not currently used for logging. The summit of Mount Richards is low, just over 340 metres high. There are rock bluffs at the summit; the higher bluff has more wildflowers while the lower bluff provides an expansive view to the west. The forest contains Crofton Lake, which is the backup water supply for the Town of Crofton.

In the next few years the municipality plans to develop Mount Richards in accordance with its Parks and Trails Master Plan (PTMP). The Plan includes:

- Officially permit recreational use of a portion of the Crofton Lake watershed area. As this lake is the backup water source for Crofton, detailed planning and stakeholder consultation will be required to determine appropriate use types and zones. Priorities include improved trail accessibility and wayfinding.
- Respond to conflicts between recreational user groups in the MFR and foster communication between those user groups. Site specific trail design and management options will be evaluated, implemented and monitored. Alternative forms of recreation to mountain biking will be promoted and enhanced on Mount Richards.
- Develop the necessary visitor supporting infrastructure and amenities at key staging areas in each MFR such as: branded gateways/entrances, sufficient parking, washrooms, bike wash stations, bike parking, picnic tables, day use shelters, signage, water access and paddling support amenities.
- In partnership with the Cowichan Trail Stewardship Society, First Nations, Tourism Vancouver Island and other partners, prepare detailed trail development plans within each Municipal Forest Reserve.

Cowichan Trail Stewardship Society asserts that Mount Richards should be developed as a world-class location for mixed-used outdoor recreation; Crofton should be the gateway for recreational use of the mountain.



Argument

The North Cowichan Parks and Trails Master Plan (PTMP) restricts the recreational activities on Mount Richards to hiking and equestrian users. This limits the economic potential of Crofton and limits the recreational opportunities for residents and tourists.

The PTMP objective is to avoid conflicts between recreational user groups and protect environmentally sensitive sections on Mount Richards. This can be accomplished without prohibiting mountain biking. The mountain could be segmented into zones – hike primary, equestrian primary and bike primary. Intersecting trails would have barriers to prevent high speed interactions.

The Catalyst Mill has been a primary economic driver of Crofton. Dependency on a single industry is a risk to a community's vibrancy. Developing another economic driver would reduce this risk, help drive traffic to existing businesses and facilitate the development of new businesses.

The proximity of Crofton to Mount Richards Municipal Forest could organically lead to a new source of economic development for Crofton. In Cumberland the proximity of the town to a mixed use commercial and recreational mountain has resulted in a vibrant community with a brewing company, hotel, hostel, coffee shops, bakery, vintage shops, and a market. Mountain biking has been the key driver for providing the town with an identity that has allowed it to market itself to tourists.

Crofton has recreational amenities that are adjacent to the planned trail head on Roberts Street. The location of these amenities will enhance the trail head as a destination. There is also space for more bike-related amenities in the vicinity of the trail head, such as a bike skills park. The PTMP identifies a bike skills park as a medium term goal for Mount Tzouhalem. Attracting more traffic to Mount Tzouhalem will create more congestion for the Kaska Road residents. Moving this amenity to Crofton will help level the mountain biking traffic load.

Crofton has a Local Area Plan that identifies the community as a growth centre. The municipality's Active Transportation Plan envisions a bike route between Crofton and Herd Road. Both of these goals are consistent with developing Crofton as a gateway for recreational use of Mount Richards.

Cycling tourism is an emerging sector that has demonstrated potential to support economic and social development in rural communities. See the recent Cowichan Lake Region Hiking & Cycling Tourism Action Plan for a detailed analysis on how trails generate community benefits, as well as case studies on trail development in BC. In 2016 VIU undertook an assessment of the economic benefits being derived from the Cumberland trails. The average day trip spend was \$81 per person and \$93 for those staying overnight. The 2018 Ladysmith Economic Development Strategy identified mountain bike trail development as one of 4 immediate priority projects. The 2008 Mountain Bike Tourism Association report concludes that mountain biking is a travel motivator and people will travel to destinations specifically to go mountain biking; mountain

bikers are well educated, affluent and the majority of them are over 30 years of age. Mountain biking drives more visitations and overnight stays than any other kind of trail use.

Currently, mountain bike visitors in Cowichan tend to be day trippers. Adding one more mountain trail network to the roster will result in more overnight stays. Facilitating the development of Crofton into a mountain biking hub will multiply the positive economic impact of mountain biking on the community.

Conclusion

This position paper provides a vision for Mount Richards and Crofton that encompasses economic development, tourism and recreation. Right now, while the municipality is formulating Mount Richards development plans, is the time to look at what the recreational possibilities are for the [mountain](#). This position paper adds elements that enhance the Parks and Trails Master Plan and outlines how encompassing mountain biking into the development plans could level the mountain biking load among the mountains and optimize the results for the municipality.