

Lake Windermere Westside Legacy Trail

*A multi-use non-motorized paved trail promoting
health, wealth and outdoor appreciation*

COLUMBIA VALLEY



**GREENWAYS
TRAIL ALLIANCE**

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Executive Summary

The Lake Windermere Westside Legacy Trail will be a multi-use, non-motorized, paved trail connecting the communities of Invermere and Fairmont Hot Springs. It will be located on the west side of Lake Windermere paralleling Westside Road, constructed primarily on private land, crown land and within Ministry of Transportation right-of-ways. The total length of the trail will be approximately 25 kilometers long, five meters wide with a three meter paved width and a painted centerline. The planned cost is estimated at \$3,000,000.

The Westside Trail will be a dynamic landmark that will have many positive effects on the area including community health, environmental awareness, economic development, and safety for the increasing numbers of non-motorized travellers along Westside Road. There will also be challenges to the success of a project of this size including gaining permanent access to the required land, insuring and maintaining the trail in perpetuity, building benefit awareness within the community, and fundraising to complete the project.

The initial phase of this project began with recognizance of the landscape in fall 2014, followed by landowner and interest group engagement and initial fundraising. To date, eight of the required nine landowners have agreed to provide land for the trail, fundraising to date is close to \$200,000 and a professional project manager has been hired. Once final land use agreements have been signed and additional funding is available, construction can commence with the target completion date for the Westside Legacy Trail being fall 2017, or as funding becomes available.

It is expected that funding for this project will come from a variety of sources, including corporate funding, government grants and public outreach. A target list of ~40 funding entities has been prepared and active fundraising will commence once final legal agreements are in place. To date four of the landowners have agreed to provide additional lands for parking and trailheads, three sources of low or no cost gravel have been identified and the Regional District of East Kootenay is considering insuring and maintaining the trail in perpetuity.

The project is being undertaken by the Columbia Valley Greenways Trail Alliance, a registered charity with a 13 year history of delivering successful community projects from Golden to Canal Flats, BC. The directors of Greenways are representatives from a variety of local service clubs, privately owned for-profit entities and the Village of Canal Flats.

The project goal is to complete the 25 kilometer trail with community engagement, encouraging residents, businesses and local governments to participate in unique ways they find meaningful. There will be a strong interpretive signage component to provide environmental and cultural awareness along the trail corridor. Although the immediate project is the first 25 kilometers linking Invermere and Fairmont, the vision is to expand the trail north to Radium for a total length of 51 paved kilometers anchored by two world-class mineral hot springs, Radium and Fairmont.

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Introduction

The Columbia River Greenways Alliance launched in 2002 with the intent of creating an interconnected trail network throughout the Upper Columbia Valley. In 2013, seven additional groups joined Greenways and renamed the organization the Columbia Valley Greenways Trail Alliance to work together to create a world class trail network for the enduring benefit of residents and visitors. Greenways has completed many successful trail projects from Golden to Canal Flats and now has a larger and more diverse group of Directors and member groups totalling almost 600 residents and visitors. The next project has been identified as the Westside Legacy Trail from Invermere to Fairmont Hot Springs.

In summer 2014, Greenways met with the owners of Shaunessy Ranches Ltd. (SRL) who now own 12,000 acres of land along Westside Road. The owners, Bob and Barb Shaunessy have agreed to provide contiguous land for a trail beginning near Castle Rock Estates to the end of their property near the Fairmont Hoodoos. This will be approximately half of the total distance of the trail. In addition to land, the Shaunessy's provided seed funding of \$50,000 to commence the project, which has been matched by Greenways.

Project Purpose

There are numerous purposes in connecting two communities within the upper Columbia Valley with a paved trail. The multi-purpose trail will connect people of the region in a unique and personal way. By serving a wide variety of user groups such as walkers, runners, bicyclists, roller-skiers, cross-country skiers, wheelchair users, inline skaters, families and people of all ages and interests, the Westside Legacy Trail will contribute significantly to the general health and well being of the population.

Integrating this wide range of user groups will unite various interest groups with a common project that will benefit all groups, the resident population and visitors. The completion of the segment south of Invermere will connect the regions highest population area, the District of Invermere (DOI), with the natural landscape along Lake Windermere to Fairmont Hot Springs, another significant population center and tourist destination.

An amenity like this paved trail will have a large effect on tourism in the Columbia Valley. One just has to look at the success of the "[North Star Rail Trail](#)" (aka the Cranbrook-Kimberley trail) the "[Banff Legacy Trail](#)" (aka the Banff-Canmore trail) and the "[Kettle Valley Rail Trail](#)" to appreciate the significance of these amenities to the growth of tourism in the region. The Westside Legacy Trail will take advantage of the opportunities presented along the full length of the trail to construct educational interpretive stations at suitable locations. School groups and local clubs will be able to take outdoor education to where it belongs – in the natural environment. The trail will connect to the existing DOI trail that travels within a few hundred meters of all three schools and extends through Invermere before joining another Greenways paved trail project, which will extend the trail to the Crossroads intersection on Highway 93/95.

Proposed Route

The paved trail will be located primarily on the west side of Westside Road. It will begin near Castlerock Estates to the north (DOI boundary) and link to a new parking lot/trailhead at Fairmont Hot Springs (see Figure 1). The trail will be located primarily on private land and where necessary, due to other private land or terrain constraints, be located within Ministry of Transportation right-of-ways.

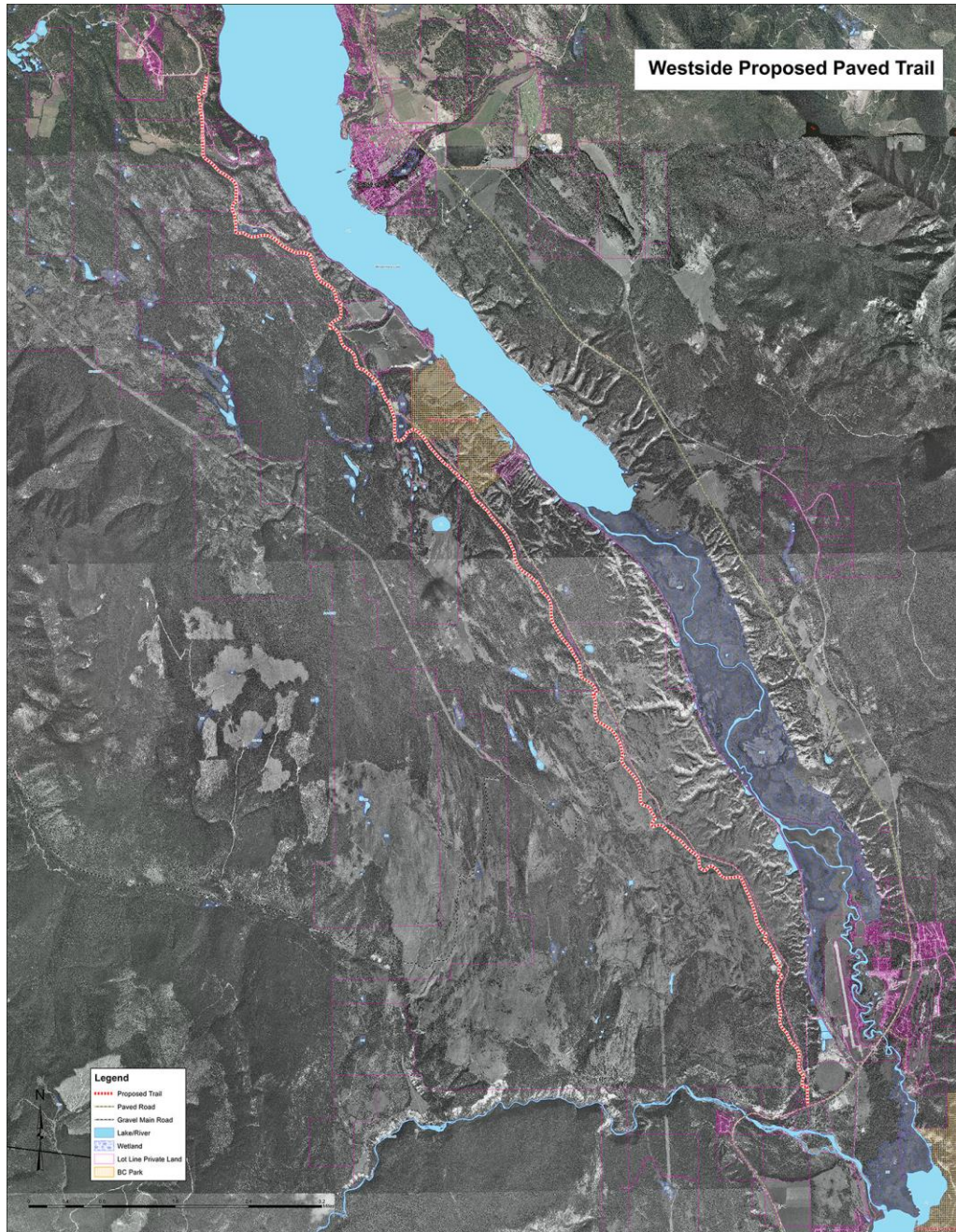


Figure 1. Proposed Westside Legacy Trail route

The trail will be located as close as possible to Westside Road to allow for easy access from multiple points along Westside Road, and access to flatter sections for wheelchair users. It will utilize, but not be limited to, existing old roads and/or trails. The trail will be designed to capture significant landmark features such as viewpoints, vistas, and kettle lakes, and will utilize terrain features such as ridge tops to provide varied experiences. The trail will maintain a narrow treed right of way where possible to maintain a wilderness setting and will avoid long straight sections with a preferred winding route to provide trail users a natural experience.

Trail Attributes

The trail will have the following attributes:

- approximately 25 km in total length
- five meter wide gravel subsurface
- three meter wide paved surface
- narrow treed right of way to ditch line edges
- less than 5% grade with only short pitches up to 10% where required for terrain constraints
- water management features, including ditch lines, culverts and open bottom structures on fish bearing streams
- Painted centerline

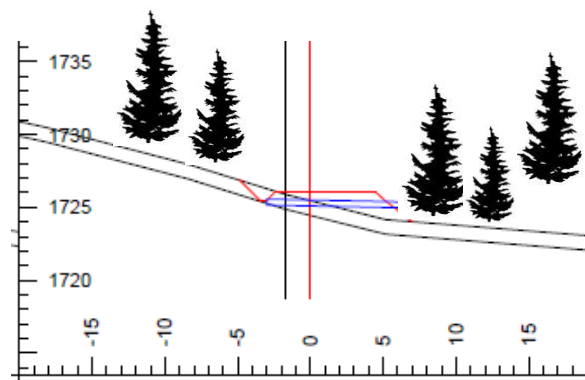


Figure 2. Schematic diagram of cross-section of trail surface.

In addition to the above, several steel gates will be required at road crossings to slow trail traffic (similar to the Cranbrook-Kimberley or Banff-Canmore trails). For safety measures, [jersey barriers](#) will be established where the trail is adjacent to Westside Road. Interpretive signage will be installed at key learning locations to enhance the visitor experience (i.e. wildlife viewing areas, grassland interpretive signage, conservation lands, etc.). The trail will be accessible to all users including cycling, walking, running, roller skiing and wheelchairs.

Budget

The planned cost of design, engineering and construction is estimated to be approximately \$3,000,000.

Annual maintenance will be required to clear downed trees, sweep the trail surface, brush trail edges and repair seasonal damage at an estimated cost of \$20,000/year.

Benefits

This is a unique opportunity to create a significant linear trail system with the support and consent of a small number of landowners. This opportunity has coincided with non-motorized user groups coming together as a trail alliance to pool resources towards this incredible common goal. The Westside Legacy Trail will be a dynamic landmark that will have many positive effects on the community.

Community health – Common trail activities such as walking, bicycling and cross-country skiing are all relatively inexpensive activities that provide accessible recreation opportunities to all community members. There is also evidence that improved trail facilities mean greater participation in healthy activities. There is significant evidence that participation in these activities results in not only better physical health, but better mental health. Healthy individuals result in a healthier community and lower health care costs.

Economic development– A 25 kilometer paved recreational pathway is an asset that very few communities have, combined with the incredible scenic vistas of Lake Windermere, the Columbia Valley and the historic [K2 ranch](#). Providing locals, second home owners and tourists with a multi-use trail, encourages all of these groups to spend more time in the Columbia Valley, which will provide [economic development opportunities](#) for retailers and other businesses such as sports equipment rentals, shuttles, restaurants and hotels.

Educational benefits – Access to the less developed side of the valley will allow users to interact with the natural flora and fauna of the Columbia Valley. Education initiatives including interpretive signage will offer unique hands-on learning opportunities that are reinforced by individuals having access to the “wild side” of the valley.

Community access – This trail will initially link the communities of Invermere and Fairmont Hot Springs and the families that live between. This physical link will not only allow alternative transportation and commuting opportunities, but will also bring together many users in an environment that encourages interaction and community building as is currently being experienced upon the Lake Windermere [Whiteway](#). Over 80% of the trail will be located on lands protected from further residential development.

Safety – Walkers, runners and cyclists already put Westside road to prolific use. These users assume nearly all of the risk of sharing the road with motor vehicles. Separating these users will make both recreating and driving in this area a safer experience for everyone. When Westside Road is eventually resurfaced, vehicle speeds may increase making an off-highway trail a safer experience.

Multi-use- Walkers, runners, cyclists, cross-country skiers... Families, seniors, teens... a paved trail is an asset for many user groups engaging in multiple activities throughout the day and throughout the year.

Events – This infrastructure will draw event organizers to the valley to add new event opportunities to the list of non-motorized events currently being hosted.

Future – The paved trail will benefit our community today, and with proper upkeep our children and their children. Just as the roman roads are used all over Europe today, the Legacy Trail will be built in a sustainable manner that will bring significant benefits in the future with minimal future cost.

Challenges

It is important to consider the challenges of this project in order to proactively find solutions.

Building momentum and trust – This is an ambitious project that requires the local community, government and funders to work together. Significant commitments from existing benefactors will reduce this challenge, but the Greenways organization is aware how difficult it is to complete a project this large. A dedicated project manager with strong communication skills will reduce the size of these challenges.

Fundraising – Raising \$3 MM to complete the trail will also be a challenge. The local community does not have the large corporate base that often supports such ambitious projects in other communities, however there is a large community of second homeowners with significant financial resources who will be encouraged to support this project. The owner of SRL, Bob Shaunessy, is leading the fundraising committee.

Landowner authorization – the trail can be built upon land owned by nine landowners, all of which have indicated support for this or a similar project. Without the support of all of these landowners, the project will not be possible. Eight of the nine have already signed various agreements committing their support.

Engineering – the west side of the valley has some challenging topography. Building a sustainable trail with a grade that is acceptable to many user groups participating in different activities will be challenging across this rolling, occasionally wet and sometimes hilly route. Trail marking activities to date have included area contractors with significant forestry road building experience and the equipment to build a trail on the challenging terrain.

Insurance and maintenance – As the trail will be built primarily on private land the landowners will require assurance trail users will not increase liability and the trail itself will be properly maintained in perpetuity. To provide the required assurance, the Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK) has been approached to assume maintenance for the trail after construction, and insure it for public use as they do with other regional parks.

Project Phases

1. Phase One – Land Use Authorization
 - a. Determine trail routing in consultation with landowners
 - b. Develop ongoing liability and maintenance coverage
 - c. Obtain landowner approval (initial MOU's & final agreements)
2. Phase Two - Fundraising
 - a. Raise sufficient funds to complete planning, design, engineering and surveying activities
 - b. Raise incremental funding to engage supporters to complete trail development
 - c. Develop a recurring funding model to ensure the trail will remain in perpetuity
3. Phase Three – Marketing & Communications
 - a. Determine the right marketing message to engage the community and donors
 - b. Development of a marketing plan and social media activities to raise required funding
 - c. Remain engaged with trail users to ensure the community asset is successful
4. Phase Four – Construction
 - a. Construct a safe, sustainable and cost effective trail utilizing local resources
 - b. Ensure construction activities are professionally performed on time/budget and include unique value add amenities (i.e. interpretive signage)
 - c. Complete trail and amenities as funding becomes available
5. Phase Five – Operations
 - a. Document all aspects of the project within an online records management repository to re-use in subsequent trail extensions to Radium and Canal Flats
 - b. Track financial and operational metrics with regular planned vs. actual reporting
 - c. Document and integrate maintenance and community engagement practices to ensure trail users respect private land, utilize the trail in a safe manner and have the ability to provide input for enhancements and extensions. This phase will include ongoing safety audits.

There is limited activity underway from phases 2-5, but those phases will not fully commence until legal agreements with all landowners have been signed.

This project is being developed in conjunction with the [Okanagan Rail Trail Society](#) and the [Shuswap Trail Alliance](#) as those groups have also recently initiated multi-million dollar paved trail projects, and all three organizations are sharing best practices as each initiative moves through similar project phases. The CVGTA is also in communication with engineering and maintenance resources from the Banff-Canmore, Cranbrook-Kimberley and [Gallopig Goose](#) trails to ensure the Westside Legacy Trail benefits from their experience.

Funding

It is expected that funding for this project will come from a variety of sources, including corporate funding, grants, and public outreach. To date, almost \$200,000 has been committed to the project, a professional project manager has been hired, the mapping of the proposed route has been provided to all landowners, and the majority of the route has been flagged. An additional \$150,000 to \$200,000 will be required to complete engineering, surveying and preparation of legal agreements to secure the land and begin construction. Large-scale fundraising will commence upon securement of all required lands.

Key Project Partners

The key partners in this project are Shaunessy Ranches Ltd., Grizzly Ridge Properties, Fairmont Hot Springs Resort, the Nature Trust of British Columbia, the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Forests, Land and Natural Resource Operations and the Regional District of East Kootenay. These groups control the majority of the land and will have valuable input for ongoing maintenance of the trail.

The Ministry of Transportation plays a significant role in the project, as the trail will be positioned within their right-of-ways in a number of locations. To date the Ministry of Transportation has reviewed the entire route and is awaiting engineered drawings to begin the permitting process.

Other Stakeholders

There are many other stakeholders who can make significant contributions to the success of this project. They begin with local construction companies who have already offered large equipment, expertise and reduced rates for construction. Three separate entities have offered low, or no-cost gravel situated along the route, and numerous local contractors have expressed interest in building amenities such as bridges, benches, trailheads and signage.

Summary

Significant progress has occurred with all landowners as well as the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Forests, Land and Natural Resource Operations and the Regional District of East Kootenay. The working relationship with those entities is a key success factor enabling the project to proceed into fundraising and construction after securement of the required lands. Upon completion of the project, there will be a template to further the vision of connecting the two world-class mineral hot springs (Radium and Fairmont) and eventually link to the Source of the Columbia Pathway in Canal Flats.