

News Release

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Protection of Larch Hills Bogs first step in new non-winter trail use recommendations for the area

The Shuswap, British Columbia – New barriers were placed in the Larch Hills this Friday to protect the areas wetland bogs from further damage. The first of several proposed barriers were placed on Bilbo's Bog, Frodo's Bog, and Cottonwood Cutoff funded through a cooperative effort between BC Parks, the Ministry of Tourism Sport and the Arts Recreational Sites and Trails Office, and the Ministry of Forests, with assistance from Ministry of Transport.

Ministry officials were acting on recommendations that grew out of the 2007 Non-Winter Trail study for the area. An advisory team representing motorized and non-motorized recreational users of the Larch Hills trail system has been working together since last year to develop a sustainable management plan for the non-winter months. The process, initiated by the Larch Hills Nordic Society together with the Shuswap Trail Alliance, included community consultation and input from the many stakeholder groups in the area.

The Larch Hills Non-Winter Trail Advisory included leadership from the Larch Hills Nordic Society, Shuswap Outdoors!, the Shuswap Trail Alliance, the Ministry of Tourism Sport and the Arts Recreational Sites and Trails office, the Ministry of Environment/BC Parks, the Columbia Shuswap Regional District Parks Office, Backcountry Horsemount of BC, the EQ Trail Riders Association, Sicamous Quadders, Salmon Arm Nature's Nomads ATV Club, the S.O.R.E. Motorcycle Club, Salmon Arm Fish and Game Club, Shuswap Naturalists, Woodlot 1571 & 1572 Licenssees, and other stakeholder groups including industry and local residents. As well, the Splats'in Indian Band Lands and Waters Department have acknowledged their interest and commitment to the protection of the areas ecology including the Mara Meadows.

The Province of BC's Ministry of Tourism Sport and the Arts Recreational Sites and Trails Office, Larch Hills Nordic Society, and the Shuswap Trail Alliance jointly funded the study. The area is one of the province's largest cross country ski areas managed by the 900 member strong Larch Hills Nordic Society during the winter months.

Care for the areas sensitive wetland ecology was affirmed as a top priority in the recommendations. Barriers were recommended as one tool for protecting environmentally sensitive areas within the Larch Hills trail system like Bilbo's and Frodo's Bogs during the non-winter months. Cross-country skiing through these open areas is allowed during winter months when the snow depth is able to protect the area from damage. Any access during the summer months, however, causes significant damage to the wetland ecology.

Included in the report is a recommendation to designate trails within the old growth forest on the western part of the Larch Hills system as a non-motorized zone. Other trails in the area were identified as being well suited for mixed use by both motorized and non-motorized users. Issues of speed, safety, and control of noise were also identified with solutions including the creation of the main parking and gathering areas as idle-only zones. "It was a very creative, respectful, and positive collaborative effort," remarked Phil McIntyre-Paul, project coordinator with the Shuswap Trail Alliance.

Recreational users in the area have already noted the results of the advisory's work. "There has not been as much environmental damage to the bogs this year as last year," notes Larch Hills Nordic president, John Henderson. Shared commitment to educate users and agreements on which trails can sustain different types of use appear to be reducing impact on more sensitive trails in the area.

The bogs, wetlands, and watercourses are critical to the areas ecology. Of particular concern is the flow of water to Mara Meadows Ecological reserve. BC Parks established special protection for Upper Violet Creek and Bilbo's and Frodo's Bogs in February 2006, and new legislation introduced last year provides widespread protection throughout all crown land for anyone causing environmental damage subject to penalties up to \$100,000 and imprisonment.

Joint monitoring of the area by members from the advisory organizations revealed a few people were still entering sensitive areas even after signs were put in place. Damage to BC Parks signs in the early spring and then later this summer prompted ministry officials to move forward with the barrier plans.

Barriers that could be moved once there was sufficient snow for skiing were determined to be the best solution to complement educational signage and cooperative management of the area. Other trails throughout the area have also been signed for closure to allow for rehabilitation. Advisory representatives will reassemble this fall to continue moving the stewardship recommendations forward.

For more information on the Larch Hills Non-Winter Trail Advisory and copies of the full Larch Hills Non-Winter Trail Use Study and Draft Trail Stewardship Recommendations along with proposed trail use maps visit www.skilarchhills.ca or www.shuswaptrailalliance.com.

– 30 –

Photo Caption: Vandalised BC Parks signs in the Larch Hills have now been replaced along with barriers to prevent further damage to the areas sensitive wetland bogs. BC Parks has been working in collaboration with the Provincial Sites and Trails office, Ministry of Forests, and Ministry of Transport to support the efforts of the local multi-use trail advisory launched last year. Damage to the areas environment is subject to fines of up to \$100,000 and possible imprisonment. For further recommendations in the Larch Hills Non-Winter Trail Stewardship report visit www.skilarchhills.ca or www.shuswaptrailalliance.com.

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