

# **Focus Group Report: Residents/Local User Groups**

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Parks Canada  
P.O. Box 900  
Banff, AB.  
T1L 1K2

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Warden Office

Prepared by:

Melissa Mauro  
Memorial University  
St. John's, Nfld.

Carole Stark  
Canmore, AB.

Dave McVetty  
Western Canada Service Centre  
Parks Canada  
Winnipeg, Man.

## Executive Summary

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This report summarizes the findings of eight focus groups conducted with Banff residents and other local user groups between October 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Participants in the focus groups were:

1. Guides and Guide Company Owners / Managers operating in the LATB area
2. Bow Valley Mountain Bike Alliance (BVMBA) members
3. Banff Community Services Advisory Committee (CSAC) members and Town of Banff Community Services employees
4. Banff Light Horse Association (BLHA) members
- 5-8. Banff residents "at large", organized according to participants' primary trail activities

The primary purpose of the focus group research was to gain a better understanding of participants' perceptions of and attitudes toward trail use and management in the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff (LATB). In particular, the discussions were designed to identify the trail use and management issues that are important to residents/local user groups and why these issues are of concern to them.

### Key Findings

- There is *widespread, regular, and year-round use* of formal and informal trails in the study area by residents, for mixed recreational activities.
- The *LATB area serves as recreational greenspace* for Banff residents: a significant portion of their trail use in the region is due to regular, short term activities for exercise, fresh air, exploring/ connecting with the natural world and social pursuits. Many individuals concentrate their use before/after work hours or during lunchtime; consequently, *ease of access and proximity to an individual's home are key factors in trail choice*.
- *Trail use in the LATB is a major factor influencing participants' quality of life and is a lifestyle choice* -- access to trails and high quality trail experiences are both stated as "important reasons why I live in Banff." For this reason, participants feel a strong sense of ownership of trails in the LATB and are uniquely impacted by factors that affect people's ability to use and enjoy LATB trails.
- *Residents view themselves as stewards of the LATB* and express a strong desire to "give something back" to the park by actively participating in all aspects of trail management (e.g., planning, visitor education, maintenance, monitoring and self-policing); many already do on an informal and voluntary basis.
- Participants believe that, as a front-country trail system, *LATB trails should afford quality recreational opportunities for a variety of trail activities, user ages and abilities*.
- The majority of participants are generally appreciative of the recreational trail opportunities that exist in the LATB area; however, many feel that *both the number of opportunities available and the quality of their trail experiences are being compromised* by one or more of the following: safety concerns, restrictions in access, lack of a coordinated trail system between town and the front-country of the park, and user conflicts.
- *User conflicts are a major factor* affecting the quality of participants' trail experiences. Different expectations of the trail experience, as well as the concentration of different types of trail users in a few key areas, has led to real or perceived conflict between on-foot users, mountain bikers and equestrians, fueling some people to call for designating specific uses on certain trails.
- The most commonly held perception of trail management is to equate it with trail maintenance. As a group, however, *residents are generally knowledgeable about the components of a recreational trail system and the methods/tools that can be applied to manage it*; this includes: public safety, trail design, vegetation management, education/interpretation, enforcement and public involvement.

- *Closing trails and restricting use are perceived to be the usual methods of trail management* used by Parks Canada. Participants generally recognize the need for human use management of trails in the study area to protect ecological integrity, maintain the physical condition of the trails, and ensure the quality of user experiences. However, many question the extent of the restrictions/closures and their differential application to the various user groups.
- Participants identified a variety of concerns with respect to trail use and management in the LATB including: trail degradation and mis-use, user conflicts, perceived lack of equity in management among user groups, insufficient information for residents and visitors, distrust of the decision-making process, perceived favouritism of commercial/private over public interests in the LATB, and a perceived lack of a vision and overall plan to guide trail management in the LATB.
- *The majority of these concerns relate to a profound lack of trust in the decision-making process* employed by Parks Canada. There is a perception that decisions are: (1) made by "bureaucrats" in Ottawa without meaningful input from residents, and with little or no regard for how residents will be impacted by them; (2) made with inadequate or untrustworthy information on levels of human use, social and ecological carrying capacities and differential impacts of various trail activities; and (3) are usually undertaken as "knee-jerk reactions to crises" rather than arising as products of a comprehensive, proactive management planning process.

### **Key Conclusions and Recommendations**

- *Managers must consider local residents as resources for trail management*, rather than simply part of the problem. They should tap into local residents' knowledge, time/energy, stewardship ethic, and commitment to their home place to shape an overall vision for LATB trails, management decisions and their implementation. Doing so has great potential to benefit the LATB trail system and user experience, and would demonstrate that Parks Canada respects residents' knowledge of and contributions to the park.
- *Ownership by residents in the trail management strategy could be built by involving them* in decision making, trail maintenance/restoration, monitoring of human use and wildlife sightings/encounters, and education of the general public (including visitors and seasonal workers). The scope and limitations of this involvement and input must be made clear up front so that expectations are also clear and realistic. Involving residents in the development of the decision-making framework itself would help to establish the credibility of the process, and to encourage participation at all stages.
- *Parks Canada needs to clearly identify for the public the available research that informs trail management decisions, gaps in research and how the research is being applied in decision making.* This may help to dispel residents' criticism of the science behind the management decisions. It is somewhat unclear at this point what residents view 'good science' to be – this presents another opportunity for scoping and education.
- *Parks Canada may wish to consider formalizing a trail system in the study area that connects trails between town and front country to avoid the need to drive.* This system should direct people in appropriate geographical and temporal use patterns, and provide ongoing information through education, interpretation and communications about trail access, linkages, conditions, safety issues and special ecological and cultural features. Options for separate or multiple use of trails should be explored to mitigate for potential user conflicts and physical impacts.
- *An overall plan for trails in the LATB must acknowledge the larger context of development and recreational pressures in the Bow Valley* and how this underlies the need to manage human use. It should take into account the whole spectrum of pressures from human use (i.e., not just trail use alone) and the role these pressures play in degrading local ecosystems and recreational experiences. Such a plan should include mitigating for displacement of use by designating alternative trails or recreation opportunities in the area or region.

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## Introduction

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This study is part of the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff planning project. This report summarizes the findings of eight focus groups conducted with Banff residents and other local user groups between October 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

### **Purpose**

Focus groups investigate three aspects of residential trail use in the LATB area, as well as the nature of the interaction between them:

- trail use patterns of residents/local user groups
- factors underlying use patterns (i.e., motivations, constraints, preferences, etc.)
- perceptions of and attitudes toward trail use and management

While each of these aspects of residential trail use in the LATB area were explicitly addressed in the focus groups, the emphasis in the discussions was placed upon gaining a better understanding of the third: perceptions of and attitudes toward trail use and management.

In particular, we wanted to find out what issues surrounding trail use and management are important to residents/ local user groups and why these issues are of concern to them.

### **Participants and Recruitment**

The focus group participants were:

1. Guides and Guide Company Owners / Managers operating in the LATB area
2. Bow Valley Mountain Bike Alliance (BVMBA) members
3. Banff Community Services Advisory Committee (CSAC) members and Town of Banff Community Services employees
4. Banff Light Horse Association members (BLHA)
- 5-8. Banff residents "at large", organized according to participants' primary trail activities

A variety of techniques were employed to recruit participants. The two formal user associations (BVMBA and BLHA) conducted their own recruitment based on eligibility and group composition guidelines provided by the focus group coordinator. CSAC members and Town employees were recruited through a formal presentation at their regularly scheduled meeting that explained the nature and purpose of the focus group research and invited their participation. Guides and owners/ managers were contacted via telephone using a business license list as a starting point. Individuals on this list were asked to suggest others who might be interested in participating and these suggestions were followed up on.

Participants for the resident "at large" groups were recruited using a combination of: (1) contacting individuals who completed the door-to-door survey and had indicated on it their interest in the focus groups, (2) intercepting people on trails in the LATB area, and (3) placing an advertisement in the local paper and responding to resulting inquiries.

## Research Questions

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Focus group research questions are presented below. Each is accompanied by a brief description of the survey data and the focus group research questions that were formulated to address it.

The set of specific questions and probes to be posed in the discussions was essentially the same for all eight groups; however, for some groups it was necessary to make minor changes to individual questions in order for them to remain relevant and effective. An effort was made to keep these modifications to a minimum so that comparisons could be made among the groups. An example of one of the questioning routes is found in Appendix A.

- Which trails/areas in the study area are used by participants? for what activities? At what times of the day or year?
- What are the characteristics of participants' 'typical' use patterns (i.e., type and timing of use, trail choice, etc.)?
- What qualities characterize the type of experience participants are looking for when they use trails in the LATB area?
- What obstacles exist that can/do prevent participants from obtaining this experience?
- What do participants perceive trail management to be? What do they *not* perceive it to be?
- What experiences and observations have shaped these perceptions?
- What trail use and management issues in the study area are important to participants?
- What experiences and observations have led to these concerns and priorities?

## Findings

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Discussion summaries for each focus group are contained in Appendix B.

**Note:** “Formal” trails refers to those trails that are officially signed and maintained by Parks Canada. “Informal” trails refers to trails that are not signed or maintained by Parks Canada, including game trails which are currently used by people for recreational purposes.

### 1. Which trails/areas in the study area are used by participants? For what activities? At what times of the day or year?

#### Trails used

LATB trails mentioned most frequently by participants are: Tunnel Mountain (formal trail as well as informal trails on both front and back sides), Spray, Fenland, the Vermilion Lakes area, and Sundance. The primary uses of these trails are hiking, running and studying/exploring nature; Spray and Sundance are also used for biking, and the informal trail network on Tunnel is frequently used for biking and horse riding.

While still popular, less frequent use is attributed to: Hoodoos Trail, Johnson Lake, Minnewanka area, Sulphur Mountain, Upper and Lower Stoney Squaw, Cave and Basin, the Marsh Loop and the Golf Course area. Hiking, running and studying/exploring nature are the key activities. Upper and Lower Stoney Squaw also receive moderate levels of mountain bike use.

#### Trail use by activity type

Other trails identified by participants for walking and hiking were: Hoodoos from Surprise Corner to the viewpoint, Healy Creek, Middle Springs (for past use – presently it is closed), trails behind Valley View, C-Level Cirque and the Norquay-Cascade Loop.

Mountain bikers who are looking for flatter terrain prefer the Spray area and Cascade Fire Road. Bikers in family groups frequently use the paved trails that lead through and out of town. Bikers wanting steeper, more challenging terrain ride Tunnel or Norquay, or move out of the study area.

Horse riders tend to concentrate their use along trails in the immediate vicinity of the corrals for shorter rides (1-2 hours). Time permitting, riders enjoy trails on the north side of the highway and a few trailer to other areas within the LATB (e.g., to the Golf Course area to ride along the Bow or Spray). For full-day rides, many will move

outside of the study area and trailer to backcountry regions within the park or to Kananaskis Country.

Guides’ use of trails in the LATB area varies according to their area of specialty. Those offering nature interpretation services make use of most of the shorter, formal trails in the LATB area (e.g., Johnson Lake, Tunnel, Vermilion Lakes road, etc.). Edith and Cory are used as access routes for back-country tripping. One individual whose company caters to corporate clients focuses team-building activities at day-use areas (e.g., Minnewanka) and uses the surrounding trails only in a very limited fashion.

Participants using trails for short-term (less than 3 hours) exercise, social activities or dog-walking with family/friends focus their year-round use on trails immediately adjacent to or leading out of the townsite. Residents looking for a half-day or full-day hiking experience generally use trails further away from town. A few individuals regularly go on full-day “wanders” utilizing formal and informal trails in the study area.

#### Use of informal trails

Informal trails are used frequently by hikers/walkers, mountain bikers and dog-walkers. Informal trails on the back and east end of Tunnel are often mentioned by participants.

- *There is widespread, regular, and year-round use of formal and informal trails in the study area by residents, for mixed recreational activities.*
- *Trails closest to town are used most frequently by hikers, runners, walkers, and bikers for exercise, dog-walking, social and reflective/nature activities. Trails further from town are used for longer, more challenging fitness and adventure activities (both on foot and on bike).*

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## 2. What are the characteristics of participants 'typical' use patterns (i.e., type and timing of use, trail choice, etc.)?

**Note:** While the focus group sessions were divided according to general categories based on type of trail activity, individual residents tend to use trails in the study area for more than one activity.

### Frequency of use

Most participants use trails in the study area on a regular and frequent basis. On average, people use the trails 3 or 4 times a week – many use the trails daily.

### Timing of use

Participants using trails for short-term (less than 3 hours) exercise or social activities with family/friends concentrate their use after work hours and at lunchtime.

Some residents seeking rejuvenation or stress-release after work avoid busy trails (e.g., Johnson Lake) in summer, and return to use them in spring, fall and winter.

Guides seeking to provide clients with a nature experience plan their guiding activities on particular trails to avoid peak use hours. For example, Vermilion Lakes road was a popular choice among guides early in the morning or alternatively during the evening when the area is less busy.

### Trail choice

Several participants stated that they choose to use the same trail or general area several times within any given week, enjoying the opportunity that this constant frame of reference gives them to mark the coming and going of the seasons.

Individuals who use the trails for exercise, stress release, dog-walking or a quick outing for fresh air and connection to nature tend to choose trails based on ease of access and proximity to their home. Tunnel Mountain, the trails behind Valley View, Sulphur Mountain (front-side) and to some extent Spray, Sundance and Fenland are all easily accessed and close to town. As noted above, horse riders tend to use the area in the immediate vicinity of the corrals most frequently for short rides.

Participants use trails both individually and in social or family groups for a variety of activities. Family use tends to be more casual, focusing on trails immediately adjacent to the townsite (e.g. biking on paved trails with bike trailers). Groups of friends who value the social aspect of trail recreation and the potential for a harder physical workout use trail loops and trails further from town.

Several participants identified weather and resultant trail conditions as important factors in determining which trail to use. For example, one mountain biker avoids using trails when they are wet and muddy both because these conditions detract from her riding experience and because she does not want to damage the trails.

- *A significant portion of trail use in the LATB region is due to regular, short term (less than 3 hour) activities for exercise, fresh air and social pursuits.*
- *Therefore: (1) many individuals concentrate their use of LATB trails before/after work hours or during lunchtime; and (2) ease of access and proximity to an individual's home are key factors in trail choice.*
- *People looking for an extended social activity (i.e. with a group of friends) or for a longer, more challenging outdoor experience (whether for fitness or nature exploration) search out the lesser used and lesser developed trails further from the townsite. Some of these trails require driving to the trailhead. These tend to involve half or full day trips.*

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## 3. What qualities characterize the type of experience participants are looking for when they use trails in the LATB area?

### Perceptions/expectations of LATB

The LATB are not generally considered “wilderness” given the noise of the highway and railway, and the perception that trails are too crowded and not challenging enough. For a “true” wilderness experience residents prefer to use Banff National Park backcountry trails outside of the study area. However, participants strongly value the ability to “escape” from town into areas in the LATB where they feel closer to nature, wildlife and a stress-free environment. Trails in the LATB provide opportunities for immediate access to such areas.



### Quality of life

A common theme expressed by participants is that trail use in the study area is a lifestyle choice, and is a key factor influencing their quality of life in Banff. Access to trails and high quality trail experiences are both stated as “important reasons why I live in Banff” by many residents. Some add that “getting there without having to use a car” is an important aspect of a high quality trail experience.

### Quality of trail experience

The definition of a ‘high quality trail experience’ varies greatly between participants. Hikers, walkers and people wanting to connect with and explore nature tend to prefer the less frequently used, less developed trails in the study area because they are quieter and less crowded (e.g. the Marsh Loop). The existence of developed trails (i.e. paved, handrails) in the LATB is, however, appreciated by many on-foot users (whether or not they make personal use of them because they accommodate a diversity of user activities, ages, life stages and skill levels.

Many mountain bikers prefer to ride on less-developed trails that allow for up and downhill, and the potential for harder exercise. Trails on the front and back of Tunnel are seen as providing this experience. Bikers who ride with young children or who are looking for a less “challenging” experience prefer wider, more developed trails (i.e. paved or hard gravel) on flatter terrain.

Several participants who regularly walk their dog on trails in the LATB area expressed a desire to have a designated off-leash area where dogs are legally allowed to run freely. Cascade Ponds was considered an ideal potential location.

Participants appreciate the social aspect of occasionally meeting other users on the trails, as long as the overall number of users is not too high. Safety concerns (e.g., wildlife encounters, accidents) are partially alleviated with the knowledge that other people are nearby.

Horse riders in particular expressed an appreciation for the social aspect of their activity. The corral area serves as the hub of social activity for BLHA members and their families. Riding within small groups where members share their knowledge of the area and its history with each other was stated by several members

as an important element of their riding experience.

Some participants noted that visitors’ perceptions and expectations of a “quality experience” often differ greatly from their own as residents (e.g., expectations of quiet, acceptable levels of trail and facility development or volume of people on trails), and that the LATB area should afford opportunities for both groups.

It is interesting to note that beyond several participants who are birdwatchers, few participants stated explicitly that seeing or being close to wildlife was a factor in the quality of their *trail* experience. With the exception of these individuals, wildlife was only brought up in the context of safety and management issues (see below). The value of wildlife was, however, indirectly mentioned by many participants who stated that one of things they “love about living in Banff” is the day to day contact with nature (i.e., including wildlife).

- *Participants recognize that the characteristics of a quality experience differ for different people (including visitors) and believe that, as a front-country trail system, LATB trails should afford quality recreational opportunities for a variety of trail activities, user ages and abilities.*
- *Easy access to trails and high quality trail experiences is a key element of Banff residents’ quality of life.*
- *The LATB area serves as recreational greenspace for Banff residents.*
- *Participants feel a strong sense of ownership of trails in the study area; this is especially true with regard to the informal trails that have been pioneered by and are primarily used by residents.*
- *For these reasons, residents are uniquely impacted by factors that affect people’s ability to use and enjoy LATB trails; and they take such factors personally.*

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## 4. What obstacles exist that can/do prevent participants from obtaining this experience?

### Safety

Horse riders – especially those with children who ride – consider the “new” (i.e., current) location of the horse corrals problematic because riders must now cross the railway tracks and the Trans

Canada highway to access traditional riding areas on the north side of the valley. They are also fearful of potential injuries that could result when riders have sudden encounters with mountain bikers or where their trails parallel busy roads and horses may be spooked by vehicles. Several riders related stories of accidents and close calls to illustrate their concern.

Some participants are fearful of negative encounters with wildlife and choose trails with this mind. For example, they avoid trails which previously were favourites, and/or stick to those where they expect to see other people – especially when travelling alone or with small children. Several participants referred explicitly to the recent cougar and wolf incidents in and around town as having heightened their concern.

CSAC members/Town of Banff employees and several other participants expressed safety concerns related to a lack of trail maintenance. In particular, the formal trail on Tunnel is considered dangerous as it has become badly eroded with loose gravel on top of smooth, steep ground. Sections of the Sundance trail where pavement is heaving and crumbling are also noted. Hazards such as these are seen to deter residents and visitors from using and enjoying area trails –especially if they are elderly, physically challenged, or less skilled/experienced. They are also regarded as a serious liability risk for Parks Canada.

### **Trail restrictions/closures**

Many participants experience the suite of current trail restrictions and closures in the LATB area as significantly limiting their ability to use and enjoy it. Mountain bikers are particularly unhappy about these measures, with some viewing them as personal attacks on their freedom. Bikers who prefer unpaved, technically challenging trails feel that very few quality riding opportunities remain – especially given the natural limitations of the valley bottom terrain. The recent restrictions and closures in Canmore have further limited their ability to enjoy their activity in the Bow Valley.

In general, participants who travel primarily on-foot did not tend to feel the impact of the restrictions as severely or negatively. Some expressed the view that a wealth of recreational opportunities are still available in the LATB and

the park in general. This is likely related to two factors: (1) relative to other groups, on-foot users have retained the greatest degree of trail access in the LATB and (2) many of the on-foot participants seek contemplative/reflective experiences with the natural world; they may perceive the closures as contributing positively to this experience by reducing overall use and the incidence of user conflicts, and by enhancing ecological integrity.

In general, new residents (e.g., less than 2 or 3 years) tend to view the restrictions and closures more favourably than longer-term residents. The former group tends to emphasize the perceived benefits to wildlife while the latter stress the incremental loss of recreational opportunities.

Some participants in the guide group feel the restrictions hinder their ability to offer quality experiences to their clients. Others feel that they actually enhance the client experience by restoring wildlife movements in some areas, and by contributing to ecological integrity as a "product" which they can "sell" to their clients as part of the national park experience.

While having access to trails is very important to residents, a couple of participants talked explicitly about the importance of a quality experience, and suggested that free access to everyone at all times does not necessarily contribute to a quality experience if crowding, trail damage and user conflicts result.

### **Lack of coordinated trail system**

Some participants feel that the LATB area does not have a coordinated trail system that affords "from your doorstep" (i.e., no car needed) opportunities to get out into half- or full-day trips in the park. They desire improved connections between the town and the park and suggest that the development of some new paths and improved signage would help achieve this.

These same individuals expressed the view that this type of front-country trail system is consistent with the Park mandate because it would encourage visitors to get off Banff Avenue and out into the park – to experience and appreciate the park in a human-powered, relatively low-impact manner. Others were uncomfortable with this idea fearing that an influx of more people onto the trails would

negatively impact the natural environment and/or their own quality of experience.

### **Noise/activity**

Guides find that the noise of the highway, railway, air traffic and other trail users in the LATB area make it challenging to facilitate a natural experience for their clients. There was disagreement as to whether or not this constitutes an important concern. Some suspect that their clients may actually perceive the area as quite “wild” depending on where they are from and their previous experiences; some note that they can simply take clients elsewhere within the park (e.g. along the 1A) or refer clients to places outside of the park for a “truly Canadian wilderness experience”. Others felt very strongly that the remaining pockets of relatively peaceful, undisturbed land in the LATB should be protected and that guide operators should use them, rather than go elsewhere and bring the impacts of their use with them.

### **User conflict**

Many participants experience conflicts with other trail users related to safety, ethics, aesthetics or interruptions to their trail experience. For example, horse use affects on-foot users and mountain bikers due to manure and ruts in the trail. Users sometimes need to stop or pull over to allow bikers or equestrians to pass. Participants expressed frustration at these inconveniences and yet believe that it is the responsibility of trail users to be considerate of one another.

Several participants observe that areas with concentrated use by on-foot users, horse riders and bikers (e.g., Spray Loop or the more popular trails on Tunnel) have a higher incidence of conflict than do less-used trails.

Complaints about mountain bikers were primarily directed toward downhill mountain biking which utilizes very steep terrain and often involves the use of vehicles to shuttle riders to the top of a run. Participants believe that downhill riders abuse and damage trails, are a safety hazard for other users, and are generally inconsiderate toward other trail users. Downhillers are blamed for causing the use restrictions that have been placed upon mountain biking in the LATB area. The bikers in the focus groups are adamant in distinguishing and distancing themselves from downhill bikers.

Complaints about horses were primarily directed toward commercial horse operations rather than local riders who tend to travel in much smaller parties. In addition to the inconveniences noted above, negative attitudes held by some participants toward commercial horse use on trails is also related to a perceived favouritism of commercial horse operators over other users in the LATB area and in the park in general.

For their part, many participants in the BLHA tended initially to downplay conflicts with other users, stating they “never” have any difficulties when they encounter others on trails. The ensuing discussion revealed that some participants do, however, experience conflict with other trail users – in particular with mountain bikers. They worry that the speed and noiseless nature of mountain bike travel, combined with the unpredictable and sometimes skittish behaviour of horses creates a safety hazard on trails with blind hills or steep corners (e.g., trail up Tunnel from the corrals).

One long-term resident has observed among trails users a growing sense of impatience with and lack of tolerance for the presence of others on a trail. This participant speculated that the phenomenon may be related to residents’ desire to escape from the busy-ness of town or from working with tourists all day, into an environment where they did not have to interact or share “their” space with others.

A minority of participants stated explicitly that they did not feel conflict with other users, and that they very much enjoy and value the fact that some trails in the LATB can accommodate multiple use.

- *The majority of participants are generally appreciative of the recreational opportunities that exist in the LATB area; however, many feel that both the number of opportunities available to them and the quality of their trail experiences are being compromised by one or more of the obstacles outlined above.*
- *Restrictions in access are seen as the major factor limiting available recreational opportunities on trails in the LATB.*
- *For the most part, participants do not view any single restriction or closure as severely affecting their ability to use and enjoy the LATB; rather, the limitation has arisen as a cumulative impact of all of these measures.*

- *This is particularly so for mountain bikers who feel that, combined with recent restrictions in other parts of the park and around Canmore, they have been largely shut out of the Bow Valley and the park as a whole.*
- *User conflicts are a major factor affecting the quality of participants' trail experiences. Different expectations of the trail experience, (as well as the concentration of different types of trail users in some areas) has led to real or perceived conflict between on-foot users, mountain bikers and equestrians, fueling some people to call for designating specific uses on certain trails.*
- *For horse riders, safety concerns are a major factor affecting both the trail opportunities available and the quality of their riding experience.*

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**5. What do participants perceive trail management to be? What do they *not* perceive it to be? What experiences and observations have shaped these perceptions?**

**Aspects of trail management**

The most commonly held perception of the participants is to equate trail management with trail maintenance. Trail maintenance includes: maintenance of trail surfaces, clearing brush, removing obstacles, restoring damaged and eroding areas, and being proactive in preventing future damage. Parks is seen to be cutting back on trail work and maintenance, and on visitor education due to lack of financial and human resources.

Public safety (relating to wildlife and other environmental hazards), trail design and vegetation management (needed to mitigate for erosion and braiding of trails) are further aspects of trail management that participants consider important.

**Management tools/methods**

Closing trails and restricting use are perceived to be the usual methods of trail management used by Parks Canada. Many participants are critical of Parks, believing that this approach is taken because it is politically expedient and overly simplistic. They want Parks to investigate alternatives to closure and to consider that residents are uniquely impacted by restrictions.

Mountain bikers are particularly sensitive to trail closures based on past experiences with mountain bike restrictions on BNP trails (e.g. Bryant Creek). While most participants accept that some restrictions are necessary to protect wildlife and ensure safety of the public, they question the extent or degree of the closures. A few do not recognize any need for managing human activities on trails in the LATB area, believing that Parks is creating an issue where none exists.

There was disagreement as to whether voluntary closures are effective tools for managing human use. Some participants feel they are ineffective because "responsible people" comply but "irresponsible people" don't. These participants expressed the view that if there is good reason to close an area, they would prefer to see a full, legal closure. Other participants feel that voluntary closures are appropriate in a democratic society, and are sufficiently effective (from a wildlife point of view) when combined with education to explain why people are being asked to limit their use of an area.

Many participants believe that effective trail management requires communication, interpretation and education for all trail users. Participants explicitly stated that park visitors and residents have different information needs. Residents want information on the rationale for trail restrictions or closures, changing trail conditions and potential hazards. Visitors and new residents are seen as requiring information that allows them to safely and appropriately access and use trails (e.g. signage and brochures with information on trail conditions, distances and etiquette; increased presence of park personnel on trails). Several participants stated that enforcement is also a necessary management tool for those people who "know better but just don't care."

**Public involvement**

Public involvement and consultation in trail use and management are viewed as critical elements of the management process. Many participants expressed their willingness and ability to engage in trail monitoring, maintenance and restoration, decision-making and public/visitor education initiatives. However, they perceive that far from encouraging public involvement in the process, Parks Canada makes it difficult for members of the public to do

anything for trails; there is too much red tape involved in volunteering and using personal initiative.

### **'Well-managed' trails**

Participants were hard-pressed at first to come up with examples of 'well managed' trails and there was much chuckling when asked to do so. As the conversation progressed, however, participants did offer some examples.

Within the study area, trails that provided for multiple use, were relatively 'hardened' and which offered interpretive opportunities were mentioned (e.g., Vermilion Lakes road, Hoodoos viewpoint, Sundance trail). These trails were seen as providing opportunities for all users. As well, participants expressed a belief that the more developed and maintained that trail, the more people will stay on it. A few participants stated that undeveloped trails in the LATB with limited maintenance (left as much as possible in its natural state) are examples of good trail management.

Outside of the study area, examples of well-managed trails tended to be named because: (1) the strategies employed to manage them make use of creative alternatives to closures; and (2) these alternatives were arrived at through a collaborative process involving user groups, Parks Canada and the best available science. Examples included: Lake O'Hara area trails (well-designed and maintained, small-scale trail maps encourage discovery of the area, cooperative approach to trail maintenance and management), Moraine Highline (science and collaboration with trail users to come up with an acceptable solution to a human-wildlife conflict) and Paradise Valley (minimum group size as an alternative to closure to resolve human-wildlife conflict).

- *The most commonly held perception of trail management is to equate it with trail maintenance; however, as a group, residents are generally knowledgeable about the components of a recreational trail system, and the methods/tools that can be applied to manage it.*
- *Given the emphasis participants place on trail maintenance, the cutbacks in Parks Canada's trail maintenance program are perceived as a failure to manage the trails.*
- *Participants generally recognize the need for human use management of trails in the*

*study area to protect ecological integrity, maintain the physical condition of the trails, and ensure the quality of the user experiences. However, many believe that the recent closures and restrictions are unnecessarily extensive and inequitable among different user groups.*

- *Some residents consider the perceived excessive use of closures and restrictions to be politically motivated and overly simplistic. They view Parks Canada as unwilling to seek out alternatives to these measures.*
- *Participants believe it is the shared responsibility of Parks Canada and trail users themselves to manage trails in the study area. Volunteers (local residents) can and presently do play an important role in trail maintenance, restoration and education to build a sense of public stewardship.*
- *Parks Canada should examine the examples of "well-managed trails" provided by participants in greater detail; the decision-making processes and management strategies they employed may prove to be effective models for managing trails in the LATB.*

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## **6. What trail use and management issues in the study area are important to participants? What experiences and observations have led to these concerns and priorities?**

### **Trail degradation and mis-use**

Trail degradation and misuse are viewed as critical issues by many participants. Shortcutting, trail braiding and proliferation, erosion, illegal fires, the presence of litter on trails, and perceived inaction on the part of Parks Canada to deal with these issues are concerns.

There was disagreement over how to manage heavy/increasing use. Some advocated trail hardening measures and the provision of more facilities (e.g., toilets, garbage cans, railings). Others strongly disagreed, expressing the view that this approach would be inappropriate in a national park. All felt that education and interpretation are critical.

### **Lack of equity among user groups**

Mountain bikers perceive that they are the group that usually faces trail restrictions and closures, and that equestrians are continuously allowed to

go where they please. Some equestrians feel the reverse is true. Both groups challenge Parks Canada to present credible evidence (i.e., peer-reviewed, independently conducted studies) that demonstrates differential impacts of trail activities.

Guides are unhappy with the maximum group size rules that are applied to them when, at the same time, commercial horse operators are allowed group sizes that are perceived as having a much greater impacts on trails and the experience of other trail users.

### **User conflicts**

As noted above, mixed use of trails by all users is resulting in impacts that affect the quality of the experience. Participants were mixed in their views of how to address multiple use and its social impacts. Comments were evenly split between recommendations for separating different users onto trails designated for their use (both temporally and spatially), and for finding ways to enable users to share trails and work together to resolve conflicts. Commercial horse riding and downhill biking were the two uses most often referred to with respect to separating use. Mitigating losses of access/opportunity of a particular use by providing alternative opportunities was viewed as important.

### **Lack of information for trail users**

The lack of and need for information for residents and visitors – through education, interpretation and communication – regarding trail use and management is a commonly expressed issue. In particular, the majority of participants feel they are not provided with adequate information to understand or accept the rationale for and implementation of trail closures.

Many participants feel that Parks Canada does not have adequate or trustworthy information on levels of human use, social and ecological carrying capacities and differential impacts of various trail activities to inform trail management decisions, or has not shown what information they have. In their view, the science lacks independence from Parks Canada's "agendas", is not peer-reviewed, and is often unsubstantiated by similar studies conducted by other individuals (or in other areas).

### **Lack of trust of the decision making process**

Past experience with what residents feel are quick decisions by Parks Canada where the rationale is not clear or adequately communicated, and residents perceive little or no regard for how they will be impacted, has led to a profound distrust of the decision-making process. Several participants referred specifically to the Banff-Bow Valley Study which they feel merely paid lip service to their concerns. A common belief is that decisions are made in Ottawa to serve political ends.

### **Respect**

Participants in all focus groups feel that Parks Canada views them as a management problem to be overcome, rather than recognizing their knowledge of and contribution to the park, and they are very frustrated by this perceived lack of respect. They view themselves as stewards of the LATB and express a strong desire to "give something back" to the park by actively participating in all aspects of trail management (e.g., planning, visitor education, maintenance, monitoring and self-policing); many already do on an informal and voluntary basis. For this reason, they are doubly offended by decisions which are taken without consulting them and which negatively impact their lifestyle.

Respect is also an important issue on other fronts. For example, mountain bikers do not feel that Parks respects them or their activity; BLHA members feel that Parks allows a double standard when dealing with commercial horse operations in the park; and guides feel they deserve more respect from Parks for their potential to influence the outcomes of human use.

### **Balancing the needs of wildlife and people**

The potential for further trail restrictions or closures concerns many participants. They worry that people will be forgotten when future decisions are being taken to protect wildlife habitat and movement corridors. These participants believe that management has moved too far towards protecting ecological integrity and urge Parks Canada to find/return to management that balances the needs of wildlife with the needs of people. Other participants disagree, feeling that Parks could do more to maintain and enhance ecological integrity, and urge managers to show leadership and "stay the course."

### **Public versus private interests**

Some participants take issue with the continued growth of commercial/private interests (i.e., the tourism industry and residential development), believing them to be the underlying root cause of the trail management issues. Commercial use and development right up to the edges of wildlife corridors is seen to be putting pressure on wildlife habitat because it attracts even more residents and visitors to Banff. Parks Canada is perceived to be 'managing' these pressures by sacrificing public use and access to the LATB to the benefit of commercial/private interests. Restricting trail use is negatively impacting local residents and yet is not seen to be addressing the primary cause of the human use/wildlife conflicts. These residents fear that Parks Canada will continue to trade public use for private benefit. They urge Parks to consider ALL human uses when assessing impacts.

### **Lack of overall trail management plan**

Participants identified a key issue being the lack of an overall vision or plan within which to frame trail management decisions. This plan should be proactive, containing: objectives for trail management, definitions and levels of appropriate use, and allocation of appropriate finances and other resources. Planning needs to consider the regional consequences of actions taken in Banff National Park (such as displacing users to other ecologically sensitive areas) as well as the localized ecological and social impacts.

- *The lack of trust and confidence that participants expressed in Parks Canada's trail management decisions is an overriding issue. To help build trust with the public, Parks Canada must be very clear about what information it has regarding trail management issues, and be willing to share that information with local residents. If information is missing (i.e. levels of human use, impacts of activities), this must be acknowledged and the basis upon which decisions are made must be stated clearly.*
- *Residents show a keen interest and commitment toward trail maintenance, restoration, monitoring (human and wildlife)*

*and planning, and toward visitor education. Actively involving residents in these aspects of trail management would benefit the trail system and user experience. It would also demonstrate to residents that Parks Canada values and respects their knowledge of and contribution to the park.*

- *Given participants' concerns about trail damage and degradation, Parks Canada should consider, as a first step, collaborating with individual and commercial trail users as well as user associations to contribute money and volunteer energy to trail maintenance and restoration, and visitor education in the LATB area.*
- *User conflicts appear to be on the rise as more users and activities are concentrated on (possibly) fewer trails. Parks Canada should initiate an inclusive process with all user groups to address these issues before they boil over.*
- *Parks Canada may wish to consider formalizing a trail system in the study area that connects trails between town and front country to avoid the need to drive. This could include a combination of hard and soft-surfaced trails, allowing for multiple uses.*
- *Residents' desire for an overall vision/plan to guide trail management in the study area suggests that the LATB Planning Project is timely and residents are ready to be engaged in a meaningful manner.*

## Researchers' Conclusions and Recommendations

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### **Lack of public trust and confidence in Parks Canada and the trail management process**

A profound lack of trust exists amongst trail users due to past experiences with incremental increases in closures and restrictions, paired with feelings of not being involved in or listened to regarding trail management decisions. This extends to a perception that Parks Canada does not recognize the human needs in this issue, and does not support residents in their own initiatives of maintaining trails and educating visitors about appropriate trail use.

- *Managers must consider local residents as resources in this issue, rather than simply part of the problem. Parks Canada can begin to build trust by tapping into local residents' knowledge, time/energy, stewardship ethic, and commitment to their home place for help in shaping decisions and implementation.*

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### **Need for meaningful public involvement**

A lack of meaningful public involvement, has resulted in residents feeling excluded from and suspicious of the trail management process. Meaningful involvement means providing opportunities for broad-based public input (of both residents and visitors) and using the input to determine options and shape decisions. It also involves being accountable to the public and sharing the necessary information to bring people up to speed on the issues and options available. Public involvement needs to be ongoing, rather than a one-off event.

- *Ownership by locals in the trail management strategy should be built by involving them in decision making, trail maintenance/restoration, monitoring of human use and wildlife sightings/encounters, and education of the general public including visitors and seasonal workers. Management should keep in mind that Lake O'Hara and Moraine Lake are viewed as successful examples of trail management primarily because they involved committed trail users who continue to give of their input and energy.*
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### **Lack of information provided about the rationale or process for trail management**

Residents have questions regarding the presence and quality of the scientific research that provides the rationale for trail management decisions (especially closures). This includes research on the biological/ecological aspects as well as research on human use and other social dimensions. Parks Canada needs to clearly identify for the public the available research that informs trail management decisions, gaps in research and how the research is being applied in decision making. This may help to dispel residents' criticism of the science behind the management decisions. It is somewhat unclear at this point what residents view 'good science' to be – this presents another opportunity for scoping and education.

Appropriate information has not been shared with residents informing them of the goals and methods used in the management process itself (i.e., how decisions are made, and by whom). Residents are hesitant to engage with the management process based on their past experiences of not seeing how their input has had any effect on Parks' decisions. Residents need to know the scope and limitations of the process as it relates to their involvement and input – they need to know what to expect. Working with residents in the development of the decision-making framework itself (i.e., shaping the goals and methods used) may help to establish credibility and to encourage involvement in the overall process.

- *Work with residents to establish and communicate a decision making framework that values and incorporates local knowledge and input, building in a framework of agency accountability to the identified publics.*
- *Share information on an ongoing basis through established communication channels: each particular audience (i.e. visitors, permanent residents, seasonal residents) will have unique needs and avenues for communication.*



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### Need to demonstrate respect

The discussions around perceived double-standards and inequities among user groups, and the frustration expressed by many participants that Parks Canada does not recognize their current and potential contributions to trail maintenance and visitor education, indicate that respect is a key issue.

- *The tone of these discussions suggest that Parks must **act and be seen acting** in ways that demonstrate respect for trail users' lifestyles while advancing a position with demonstrable basis in the mandate and backed by credible science.*

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### Need for an integrated trail system

Many residents called for an integrated trail system in the lands adjacent to the Town of Banff that provides a variety of trail experiences and levels of trail development. These trails should be linked to allow easy access, with appropriate communications to users regarding conditions, options and appropriate use. The LATB trails need to be linked with front country trails in the local area. Residents expressed contradictory opinions on separating uses on certain designated trails as opposed to encouraging multiple use of all trails.

- *Designate a system of trails for both residents and visitors to direct people in appropriate geographical and temporal use patterns. Provide information about trail access, linkages and conditions. Explore further options for separate or multiple use of trails.*

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### Need to consider the big picture/context

A recurring theme in residents' discussions of trail management is the need to acknowledge the larger context of development pressures in the Bow Valley and how this underlies the need to manage human use. As the land base is limited, restricting trail use in one area will displace the particular use to another, perhaps ecologically sensitive, area up or down the Bow Valley.

- *Mitigate for displacement of use by designating alternative trails or recreation opportunities in the area or region. Parks Canada must acknowledge up front the whole spectrum of pressures from human use, and the role these pressures play in degrading local ecosystems and recreational experiences.*

## **Appendix A: Example Questioning Route**

## Focus Group Questions and Timeline: Bow Valley Mountain Bike Alliance

Monday October 1, 2001 at 7:45pm

Topic Time	Elapsed Time	Topic	Purpose/objective
5:00	5:00	<p><b><u>Greeting, Overview</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dave McVetty (Western Canada Service Centre) and Melissa Mauro (graduate student and focus group coordinator).</li> <li>• Research project is part of a planning initiative to develop a strategy for managing recreational activities in the area surrounding the town of Banff – the discussion tonight will help Parks Canada to understand issues regarding trail use and trail management that are important to residents.</li> <li>• <b>What is a focus group? What is it NOT?</b></li> <li>• Discussion to focus on summer use only and only in the lands surrounding the townsite: refer to map on wall – note: the Town is excluded from the study area.</li> <li>• Ground rules for discussion and taping of discussion</li> <li>• You may request summaries of findings: sign-up sheet for snail/e-mail addresses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a comfortable environment for discussion.</li> <li>• Establish ground rules of focus groups: no right or wrong answers – we're looking for different points of view; no interrupting, but encourage responses to other participants' comments.</li> <li>• Clarify purpose of focus groups</li> </ul>
10:00	15:00	<p><b><u>Opening Question (Round table ice-breaker)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Let's go around the table and tell everybody your name and a bit about your experience using trails in this area (refer to map) What are some of the trails you use, what type of riding do you do?</b></li> <li>• Probe only if necessary to get people talking; keep answers brief. Potential probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often do you ride?</li> <li>• Do you ride with family or friends?</li> <li>• What other activities do you participate in on trails? e.g., hiking etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ice-breaker, get every participant to say something. Easy to answer, no "wrong" answer.</li> <li>• Gives context / background to subsequent discussion.</li> <li>• What type of experience are participants looking for on trails? What features of trail / area / social context enhance or detract from that experience?</li> <li>• <b>Note what participants like and dislike about trails / trail experiences.</b></li> <li>• <b>Note the activities and trails mentioned.</b></li> <li>• <b>Note potential patterns by activity-type, age, gender, etc.</b></li> </ul>
5:00	20:00	<p><b><u>Transition Question (Free for all)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase "trail management?" (maybe have them jot it down and refer to this when answering to ensure that get first reaction?)</b></li> <li>• Probe as necessary to clarify; keep answers brief.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are participants' perceptions of trail management? What are their emotive reactions? Are these negative, positive or neutral?</li> <li>• How have previous experiences contributed to shaping this view?</li> <li>• <b>Note potential patterns by activity-type, age, gender, etc.</b></li> <li>• <b>Look for opinions that are being skirted rather than expressed</b></li> </ul>

35:00	55:00	<p><b><u>Key Question 1 (All Participants initially, directed discussion to follow)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Now I'd like you to take a couple of minutes to think about your experience using the trail network in this area and your observations of it. In your view, what are three important issues related to trail use and / or the way trails are managed or not managed here? Please summarize each of these issues in only a couple of key words and write these down on the cards in front of you; please write only one issue on each card. Once everyone is finished, we'll talk about them.</li> <li>• Moderator will ask each participant to tape their cards up on the white board one at a time, grouping like issues together. These can be re-arranged as warranted by the discussion that follows.</li> <li>• I'd like the group to go through these issues and talk a bit more about them. Can someone who wrote one of these cards describe in a bit more detail what this issue is?</li> <li>• Potential probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is this an issue?</li> <li>• For whom is it an issue?</li> <li>• Is this true at all times of the day / year?</li> <li>• Could you give me an example of this issue?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What issues are important to Banff mountain bikers?</li> <li>• Which issues do participants see as being related or similar to each other, and which are different?</li> <li>• Which issues are common to some / all participants? Which are specific only to particular individuals?</li> <li>• How have people's experiences shaped their views of the key issues?</li> <li>• This information can be compared and contrasted with the issues that Parks Canada has identified as being important.</li> <li>• <b>Note potential patterns by activity-type, age, gender, etc.</b></li> <li>• <b>Look for opinions that are being skirted rather than expressed</b></li> </ul>
15:00	70:00	<p><b><u>Key Question 2 (Free for all)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you think of any examples of trails or scenic roads in this area that you would say have been well managed?</li> <li>• Potential probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What makes that trail well managed? What is 'good' trail management?</li> <li>• Think back to your favourite trails and other trails you like: does management play a role in making them your favourite?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does Parks Canada do well from residents' perspective?</li> <li>• What are the criteria participants use to determine when an area is being "well managed"?</li> </ul>
10:00	80:00	<p><b><u>Ending Question 1 (Round table)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suppose you had one minute to talk to the planners and managers at Parks Canada on the topic of trail management, what would you say?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows participants to reflect on the discussion and determine the most important / core issues.</li> <li>• May clarify inconsistent or ambiguous comments that a participant may have made during the discussion.</li> <li>• Brings closure to the discussion</li> </ul>
10:00	90:00	<p><b><u>Ending Question 2 (Free for all)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderator will give a brief summary of the discussion highlighting key points</li> <li>• Have I captured correctly what was said?</li> <li>• Is there anything we missed or that we should have talked about but didn't?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures that the moderator has captured major themes / topics of the discussion</li> <li>• Gives participants a chance to add any additional relevant comments</li> <li>• Provides feedback that can be used to modify / improve future focus groups</li> </ul>

## **Appendix B: Discussion Summaries**

## Recreational Use of the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff

### Summary of Discussions

#### Focus Group #1: Guiding Companies and Guides

6:00-7:30 p.m., Monday, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001

Multipurpose Room, Banff YWCA, Banff, AB

Six Participants

Moderator: Dave McVetty

Scribe: Melissa Mauro

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#### Let's go around the table and tell everybody a bit about yourself and your company, and your use of the area shown here in the map.

- A:** in business for 10 years, a current or past member of local, provincial, and national tourism boards
- clientele is corporate, uses areas around hotels and day use areas (like Minnewanka) to lead team exercises and guided hikes
  - but only a small part of business is in Banff
- B:** year-round guide with local guide company
- diverse clientele, including some corporate
  - runs multi-day backpacking programmes and single-day hikes (Sunshine Meadows), Johnson Lake morning walks, Bankhead interpretive walks, and corporate events in Banff area
- C:** owns a 15-year old company with 5-15 employees, year-round programmes
- clientele is broad, international, some pre-booked and others book in park – with few Canadians – and includes corporate activities
  - uses Stoney Squaw, Tunnel Mountain
- D:** an independent operator who serves Japanese from hotels and sub-contracts services to a local institution
- uses Edith and Cory to access the backcountry with clients; also does day hiking and interpretive walks - day-based out of hotels.
- E:** a hiking guide with 20 years experience in the Rockies, offers escorted guide service to Japanese tour company clients between Calgary and Vancouver
- uses Cory, Healy, Fireside, Cascade and Sulphur areas

- **F:** works in guiding and environmental consulting, guiding includes guided walks and hikes, road-based touring, affiliated with a local hotel's programme, customizes outings to clients' requirements
- uses most of the trails in the study area, including Spray, Golf Course, Sundance, etc.

Now, please pick up a pen and index card from in front of you. Responding as a commercial guide, I'd like you to write down the first things that come to mind when I say "trail management." (Group stopped after 40 seconds)

<b>A:</b> Rules, protection, unfair application of rules, quotas
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- gave examples of unfair application of rules: horse outfitters have larger group size, regulations on mountain bikes vs. horses
- would like to know that decisions are made based on sound principles, science, not an "old boys network"

<b>B:</b> Temporary closures, lottery system, habitat awareness
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- Parks is becoming more aware of habitat, shown by temporary closures
- trailhead communication is getting better, good message about temporary closures mean more people understand and are willing to abide
- lottery like in Yellowstone & Yosemite may be relevant in heavy use areas like Lake Louise / Moraine Lake

<b>C:</b> Parks, enforcement, closures
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- "Parks" refers to the authority that decides which trails are open or closed
- notes permanent closures since the Banff Bow Valley Study, worries about their impact on people, wonders if these were over-

reactions that were not based on good science, and part of an environmental agenda supported by some who are close to Parks

**D:** restrictions, access, wildlife corridors & closures, arbitrariness

- most of what's been done is restrictions, sometimes based on "some form of science or another"
- but without complete background information, decisions seem arbitrary

**E:** Number of hikers in groups, toilets, information system and education

- upset by seeing guided groups of 20 people with two guides, or 40 people with 4 guides to get around maximum group size of 10
- feels parks could do better job of informing overseas companies of regulations before bookings are made for next year
- if public access is allowed, toilets are needed in busy areas like Healy and Moraine (notes this is not an issue in the study area)

**F:** frequency of use, zoning time and space, monitoring to understand the system, education

- summarises by saying "yes", Parks needs to do some "serious management in townsite area"
- more monitoring to understand the human and ecological systems in the area and how the system will respond if a change is made in one location

**D:** seeks clarification on "yes"

**F:** "Yes", we need to do more of it, there is terrain and wildlife disturbance from overuse

- notes that commercial operators have an impact too and that they need to take responsibility

**A:** notes that commercial operators no longer permitted on Elbow River because of harlequin ducks, independent visitors still allowed, often showing bad behaviour

- feels commercial operators are made into scapegoats rather than being used to educate people

**F:** commercial operators can be part of the solution

- "we can be one of the tools in the arsenal"

**A:** instead, we seem to be a thorn in their side

Again, I will ask you to take three index cards and the pen in front of you. Earlier, you each described the opportunities that you offer your clients. What are three issues that get between your clients and the ideal experience that you wish to offer in the study area? (clarification: Think of them as barriers between your clients and the ideal experience for them.)

When you are done, stick them on the white board close to other cards that seem to have the same theme.

**A:** ① overly enthusiastic wardens; ② lack of privacy/too many others in area; ③ bureaucratic hoops

- for bureaucratic hoops, gave example of a tour operator's reluctance to participate in an event for fear there may be a regulation against it that they weren't aware of

**B:** ① horses along Sundance Canyon and their remains!!; ② environmentally sensitive area in Fairholme area; ③ trail maintenance (lack thereof) at Johnson Lake

- horse remains are not hygienic, affects experience for clients by contrasting with interpretive messages (scat vs. "horse shit")
- wishes hikers could still use the trail in the Fairholme environmentally sensitive area
- root exposure and erosion at Johnson Lake caused by overuse, by "too many people in the area"

**C:** ① too many branching trails locally; ② area and trail closures; ③ lack of suitable trails locally

- notes braided trails behind Tunnel Mountain or at Norquay take away from "wilderness kind of experience"
- notes that voluntary closures are different for commercial operators: "for us, it's not voluntary, really"
- feels the area lacks an "ideal ½ day hike or full-day walks", noting that Cory is too hard for most

**D:** ① noise; ② environmental damage; ③ overcrowding

- noise from the townsite, “all you hear is noise from the outside world”
- environmental damage from overuse, like braiding and branching, garbage, mountain bikes on Norquay
- overcrowding example is the Hoodoos, suggests Parks may have to “sacrifice” some areas to save others, but will need to carefully pick times and places

**Moderator: is it strictly the number of people that has an impact, or is it their behaviour as well?**

- D:** at Hoodoos, its mostly numbers (notes lots of buses), but some behaviour too (notes wedding couple driving off-road for pictures)
- it’s part of the tourist circle (i.e., the loop that tourists do in the area around the town)

**E:** ① professional approach of guide; ② ethic of hiking; ③ small number of hikers/overuse

- many guides not taking a professional approach, don’t inform clients or educate them (this is a general comment that applies to any trails)
- guides often don’t communicate the ethics of backcountry use or hiking to clients, regulations alone are not sufficient; to a certain extent, hikers should be able to figure out for themselves proper etiquette
- overuse and crowding

**F:** ① loss of ecological integrity; ② infrastructure interference; ③ user conflicts

- loss of ecological integrity affects what guides can deliver... if it’s lost, they can’t show it; ecological integrity is a “product” for clients
- existing infrastructure gets in the way; “where can you go in this valley that’s quiet?”
- recent management decisions have led to more user conflicts
- e.g.: the environmental mitigation for Middle Spring did not take into account all outcomes, so pushed horses into areas used by cars and people

- e.g.: moving the horse stables has led to a proliferation of trails in that area.

Participant grouping of issues:

- user conflicts
- horses along Sundance Canyon Trail and their remains!!
- lack of privacy or too many others in area
- too many branching trails locally
- trail maintenance (lack thereof) at Johnson Lake
- loss of ecological integrity
- noise
- environmental damage
- small number of hikers/overuse
- area and trail closures
- environmentally sensitive area in Fairholme area
- over-enthusiastic wardens
- bureaucratic hoops
- infrastructure interference
- overcrowding
- lack of suitable trails locally
- professional approach of guide
- ethic of hiking

**Now that we’ve described issues in the study area, can you give us an example of trail networks or scenic roads that are good? That is, that consistently provide an experience that meets expectations?**

**C:** C-Level Cirque for some clientele – too steep for others – but has few people; Cory Pass is “one of the classics in Banff National Park”; Tunnel Mountain is good and easy (well-graded), but noisy; Sundance is good for mountain biking

**D:** Vermilion Lakes Road: has “definitive images” of the park, close to the backcountry; is good in the early morning or late in the afternoon, good for photographers because it is not crowded – partly because it is not developed and advertised much so largely local use; has some wildlife issues



regarding human use of the underpass (people are unclear if or how to use it).

**B:** need to look from the clients' perspective, "we can hear the highway," but many clients do not mind, for them it is still pristine

**F:** partially disagrees, mentions noise of people hollering ("whooo hooooo") from rope swing at Johnson Lake

**C:** pretty much nowhere in the study area has quiet, asks "is it reasonable to expect quiet in that area?"

**A:** agrees that perception of noise may differ between guides and clients

**C:** many guides avoid doing things in the area because there are other quieter areas that are not that are still close to town

**F:** should protect areas in this area that are "quiet" rather than displace ourselves to outside of the area, need to look at the whole picture

**C:** would like to see more trails to disperse use, feels it's a shame that Banff doesn't have a network that allows a start from town and out into full-day hikes

**F:** (to **C:**) would you close another trail in exchange?

**C:** is against closing park to peoples' experiences, feels it is the best educational tool available for the future conservation of the parks; tendency of late has been toward closures and making the Park less accessible

**A:** agrees, few options for quality "walking from your doorstep" experiences in Banff, i.e., from your door and out into the park for half- or full-day hikes; "not like at Lake O'Hara"

**D:** the geographical context is different

**A:** .....perhaps [the type of trail network noted above would] give more people contact with nature, but wonders if it is better to put more people on fewer trails, or fewer people on more trails?

**F:** has the completely opposite view... feels that the study area IS the most sensitive part of the ecosystem and that guides can give good contact without new trails

– feels the job of a commercial operator is "to use what we've got rather than build new trails, to provide a good experience"

**A:** montane and montane wetlands may be less interesting to some clients; may be more interested in other types of places that are in fact less critical to wildlife...so it may be a good thing to steer people to these areas

**F:** sees the job as interpreting this environment and not letting *them* (i.e., visitors) define what they're here for

We've heard about some areas that offer your clients a consistently good experience. How much of that do you attribute to Parks Canada's management of the area?

**B:** the study area is close to civilisation, many feel safe in these areas with lots of other people, compared to the backcountry where there are more safety concerns from wildlife

**D:** (to **F:**) does Parks concentrate use in some areas to avoid use in others?

**F:** maybe, offers Moraine Lake as an example: keeping it open because it's popular but when it was closed saw increased use in all peripheral areas – so maybe there's awareness of this by Parks

**C:** setting is obviously the first thing... without that nothing else matters

– Parks plays a big role in giving the opportunity to do what we're doing and keep it in good shape...

– Parks has been doing a good job in some ways, especially in immediate Bow Valley area e.g.: improved wildlife movements have benefited the operators

**A:** to a large degree it is the place... the fact that it is managed by Parks Canada and it is a national park brings people here, makes people want to come

– wonders if it would still be as popular if it were called something else instead (e.g., the Siffleur Wilderness)

- “I guess they’re caught between a rock and a hard place because there’s so many people and you have to do something”
  - this guide often tells people **not** to come here because it’s too busy because it is a park, directs them elsewhere for a more “Canadian wilderness experience”
- F:** it is 100% place, but this guide **avoids** some places because they’re not managed, e.g.: Hoodoos, Norquay Road top, have been allowed to degenerate with widening trails, soil loss... “it’s not what it was”

- E:** it all depends on where you come from... Japanese clients come for scenery, not interested in ecological integrity or national history
- this guide likes to take clients “off the beaten track”, but they’re not always super keen; some are scared at Healy Pass because there’s nobody else around and has to tell them that this is what Canadian wilderness is like

Suppose that you had one minute to talk to the managers at Parks Canada about trail management. What would you say?

- A:** “Talk to us. Help us help. We’re not your adversaries. We can be blowing your trumpets”
- Parks is so shell-shocked, doesn’t want to move for fear of “stepping on a land mine”, but the mines move around and one may move under if they don’t take action
  - working with constituents isn’t a skill set that Parks staff are hired for
  - human use management is a new concept that requires new skills
- F:** “Keep up the good work. Talk to people who are using the trails, show leadership – have the guts to show leadership, apply

monitoring and adaptive management...  
“We’re up against the wall on use”

- C:** agrees that “we’re up against the wall on use”, but focusing on users and the environment together is the necessary long-term approach
- how do we utilise the area better? understand wildlife better?
  - feels that “cherished beliefs about EI today will be rethought in a few years”
  - suggests a return to the 1930’s mandate... “unimpaired for future generations” has strayed too far
- A:** management has to look at the current generation too
- D:** people still want to use the park and Parks has lost sight of this
- commercial operators want to educate people, they support Parks, so treat them as part of the solution, not just restricted access

- A:** people have to be happy to do it, and presenting the proper ethics can help

- B:** points out contradiction in the “parks are for people” and “these areas are overused” comments heard in this session
- suggests that “Parks needs to grow some balls” and not be too wishy-washy or worry about stepping on toes... “make a decision and enforce it, stick by it”

Nods of agreement around table

- D:** Parks needs to be proactive, not reactive

More nods of agreement

**Group ends at 7:30 p.m.**

## Recreational Use of the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff

### Summary of Discussions

#### Focus Group #2: Bow Valley Mountain Bike Alliance

8:00-9:30 p.m., Monday, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001 Multipurpose Room, Banff YWCA, Banff, AB

Ten Participants

Moderator: Dave McVetty

Scribe: Melissa Mauro

The session began with a discussion about the focus group process and its role in the overall research phase of the Lands Adjacent planning exercise.

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#### Let's go around the table and tell everybody a bit about yourself and your cycling activity, and your use of the area shown here in the map.

**A:** lived in the Banff area for 20 years

- an outdoors person, very active, looks forward to “getting out at the end of the day” after work, frequent user of trails in Banff and Canmore

**B:** a Banff resident for the past four years and volunteer with the Bow Valley Mountain Biking Alliance (BVMBA)

- enjoys the “views, air, sounds,” and the terrain for riding
- careful about where to ride alone; rides mostly with groups of 2 to 4 people, 1 to 3 times per week

**C:** lived in Banff for 23 years, participated in Banff Bow Valley Study Park User steering committee, active as a coach in a mountain biking club for kids for past 8 years, member of BVMBA for “couple of years”

- rides every day, also hikes, runs, etc.

**D:** has been riding in the area for ten years, alone and with others 2 or 3 times per week, also hikes and rides horseback

- wrote the guidebook for mountain biking in the Canadian Rockies; “I really value the opportunity to ride these trails and I would hate to see us lose those opportunities, realising that there are lots of pressures on the land”
- look for rides that are challenging (physically and technically), scenery, natural world values, wildlife fine but not essential;

buildings don't intrude, notes “you can't get away from that” [in the Lands Adjacent area]

**E:** born and raised in Banff, professional, and VP of company in tourism industry

- rides trails with friends or partner and kids 3-4 times per week, also hikes and skis; when cycling, looks for feeling of accomplishment, get into larches, to come home “tired, dirty, and bleeding”
- seen Parks Canada change in recent years, frustrated by lack of proper governing in favour of politics; Banff became a community in 1990, but “autocrats in Ottawa still run our lives”; “I've seen Parks screw up everything, pretty much, that they've touched over the past twenty years”
- “I have a very difficult time having my liberty impinged by a bunch of people I have so little respect for”; “none of us are criminals, we're mountain bikers... pay some attention to the liberty of your citizens and listen to them”

**F:** professional, lived in Banff since 1984, rides 3-4 times per week; spouse rides too, but with (spouse's) circle of friends

- “it's lifestyle... in five minutes I'm out of Banff and all it has to offer and I'm out in the quietness... it's a great experience”
- frequently sees members of the light horse association “on these very same trails, and I've never had a confrontation with any of these folks”, because both stop and determining right of way
- about 30 horseback riders and bikers on enhanced wildlife trails, which “is a direct result of Johnson Lake being closed down... for another set of reasons (based on) very little scientific evidence”
- “I have a very healthy disrespect for Parks... that starts with the Bow Valley Study” where public involvement was “non-existent, I wasted a lot of valuable time” at public forums; “that was followed by the

cutting of live trees on some of our trails at the Johnson Lake area”; Canmore has had “similar problems with the provincial government felling live trees on some of their trails, full-on closures, very little consultation”

- “I do have a very healthy distrust of what’s going on here”; you are starting another process and “I hope like hell that in two-and-a-half years I don’t just see that everything is closed again, or, perhaps worse, half of it is closed and ‘here is a map, Calgary, come and join the locals in Banff’” on their network of trails
- “so I’m also very selfish, the trail system here I would never want to see on a public base map”; feels Parks is mapping the trails either to fell live trees across them, or to put them on maps to promote them to the mass public – “either way, you’re ruining what we have up here... this is our recreation and our lifestyle and I hope like hell we don’t lose it”

**G:** professional, resident of Banff for 22 years

- rides before or after work, 2-2.5 hours, “pavement doesn’t really cut it, and I don’t see any reason why it wouldn’t be on a single track. It’s a valuable lifestyle and recreation and physical fitness”
- skis and hikes same trails, either alone (because of work schedule), with 3-4 friends, or with kids; carries a cell phone when on call from work and can be there in 15 minutes

**H:** “born and bred” in the area, retired here for last five years; “five or six days a week I use the trails, either riding, biking, or walking and I like the idea of leaving my house and in one minute being on a trail”

- regarding Parks Canada: “we don’t trust them, it’s easier for them to close something than to study it”

**I:** professional, has young children, “family has owned a house here since I was born”; uses trails in study area heavily in spring and fall but tends to avoid them in summer; also rides in winter; “I really like the tough, technical, single trails, Stony Squaw for example”; doesn’t enjoy riding valley bottom trails

- interested and actively involved in legal cases regarding trail access; working with

ACMG (Mountain Guide Association) and fly fishing groups; working against Alberta Parks, claiming legal right of access in frontcountry because “we were using them prior to legislation”

- in Banff “politics rule over and above common sense and reason, there’s a lack of science, and so there’s a great deal of mistrust... we’re willing to come here and speak in good faith, but you can probably tell by the initial questions and some correspondence we’ve exchanged with Parks Canada going into this, that we’re quite concerned that we’ll put our cards on the table, you take it in good faith, Eva takes it and works on it, and then three years down the road what I call the environmental politics wipe us right off the map without any regard for our rights or interests”

**J:** 17-year resident, uses townsite trails frequently, mostly in summer, but also hikes and cross-country skis in winter; “a lot of people have stated my same interests which is the opportunity to experience some of what we live here for, being in a national park, being in the mountains, and being close to nature, in a convenient approach that’s dictated by our lives, being able to go before work, at lunch, after work”; quick transition from home to trails, no vehicle needed to get to the trailheads

- valley-bottom trails are good connectors for trails, but don’t provide enough challenge nor scenery to meet experience of local residents

What I’d like you to do now is to take one of the markers and index cards in front of you and jot a couple of words that come to mind when you hear the term “trail management”.

**A:** ① why ② interference ③ not necessary

- new to the association, so not sure of the need; “I don’t see there being a problem and I don’t feel we’re creating a problem”

**B:** ① restrictions ② solutions

- “restrictions, I guess, speaks to me being paranoid about suddenly having to alter my freedom to explore the trail network”
- “solutions comes more from experience I’ve had in municipal parks... in certain situations trail management is necessary in order to

prevent denigration or user conflicts, but these are in very particular situations”

**C:** ① how? ② when? ③ why? (science) ④ where?

- “trail management brings up a bunch of questions for me”
- “is science backing up any such restrictions for management?”
- “solutions to manage these trails would be contingent upon what area we’re talking about... differences in how you manage the trails within a couple of minutes of the townsite and those on the periphery “

**D:** ① restrictions ② control ③ limitations ④ protection

- “there first few that came to mind are the terror ones... restrictions on our freedom and our use, control over what we do, where we go, limitations on freedom, limitations on our opportunities to enjoy the valley”
- “but then the professional side of me kicked in and also the thoughts of protection, it is a way to protect certain areas or species”

**E:** ① mismanagement ② closure

- Parks has “a legacy of mismanagement”, cutting down live trees to block trails “then telling us it’s a voluntary closure”;
- “the lack of science is incredible, it’s not predicated on proper science with peer review or conflicting views, it is very often based on created crisis in order to get money for research”
- “Parks likes to have two solutions: open or close, and they have consistently reverted to the latter... (and) we get pretty frustrated”

**F:** ① politics ② government

- “there’s this perceived problem there ... but I still don’t know what this problem is... I look at this as we’ve got a townsite and we’re surrounded by a national park full of animals, so who do you want in this zone peripheral to the townsite? Nobody? And let the animals come up and snatch our dogs off the steps? Or should we have an area where there’s some use that’s limited and who best to do that but the Light Horse Association and the mountain bikers? When I say mountain bikers I don’t include the

downhill riders in this group... I think it’s a healthy thing for the townfolk to have somewhere to go, I think it’s healthy for us to report what we see in the area” like wildlife sightings

**C:** “I wouldn’t perceive that there’s a problem with how *these* people ride, but I’m not entirely in agreement that there isn’t a bit of a management or education problem with some of the riders that are new to town” referring to “transient” downhill riders who “presume that they can ride here, and anywhere, they way they have elsewhere in the past... I think there’s an effort required in that area. I’m not sure who’s to take responsibility for that to happen... (but not) a blanket restriction on a certain activity based on behaviour of a particular” group

**E:** government shouldn’t put in the restriction, “the users are far better able to educate and prescribe, and if the government wants to help facilitate that, that’s one thing, but they shouldn’t be telling us what the rules are and aren’t”

**C:** “unfortunately... when you try on your own to educate certain characters at to how they might want to consider conducting themselves in the park, they come back to you and say ‘who are you to tell me this’, there’s a problem with authority there”

**E:** “on a mass scale”, the education information in brochures, etc., handed out at the gate may go over better if it comes from the users than from Parks Canada

**C:** perhaps both could work together (I: agrees)

**Could you clarify the different types of mountain biking for me?**

**G:** we ride on trails that can be used for hiking, with rocks, roots, drops, but the issue is downhill biking “where the guys won’t think twice about jumping a cliff as high as this ceiling... on bicycles that are motorcycles without the motor”

**F:** they must get their bikes trucked to the top of the hills

**H:** “if you can’t ride it up it, you shouldn’t come down it!”

**D:** there is a real variety of riding, from beginners who want a trail experience and will be happy riding on fire routes, to these extreme downhill guys

**G:** ① maintenance (horses! heavy horse use!)  
② closures!

- maintenance: “our responsibility to help maintain trails, but also the impact of a bike vs. the impact of heavy horses on a trail... it makes it impossible... if you’re walking, you’re in mud and horseshit to your knees, and the same thing riding”; maintenance “is a responsibility I believe the mountain bikers are willing to take on, part of what we can put back into the park”

**H:** ① closure ② do not need it ③ interacting

- closures: “do we really need it?”
- “with closures, you do not have any interacting with animals around the surrounding area. You have a fenced-off area, an animal comes closer and closer to town and gets used to it, all of a sudden a cougar’s picking a dog off the back porch”, but recreational use of the lands adjacent would help prevent animal-human interaction

**I:** ① restrictions ② designated ③ displacement ④ no user conflict/liability

- restrictions: “just another word for closures”
- designated: “certain trails are designated for certain types of use, that is just another form of closure in a different disguise”
- displacement: ” where you move everybody onto fewer trails and now you go into the American model where you’ve got user conflicts and liability”
- “on the maintenance issue, I think the mountain bike community has something to answer for with regards to trail impact”

**J:** ① closure ② restriction

- “I don’t really have a vision of trail management – and all Parks control – being negative in every application but it is true that in this context, these are the first words that came to mind”

**B:** the BVMB has an informal trail patrol; reports it is “very rare for riders on the trails

to even report seeing another rider... very low frequency of use... so we do have some informal data”

**F:** “...hence the lack of a problem”

**M:** “the perception (of heavy use) allows us to be an easy target for Parks because they think ‘We can make a lot of hoo-haw out of closing a trail for mountain bikers and look at the political hay we can make for our master Sheila Copps’, but they can’t actually prove that anything has really improved, it’s purely politics”

**I:** “although, there are groups who will say that there is distinct human use impact directly on animals, but that’s also a moving goal post. What they’re saying there is any human entrance into any valley at all upsets the ecological integrity and pristine nature of it. So parks is driven by some odd politics”

**C:** mentions closures around Johnson Lake, “that area continues to be frequented by wildlife biologists who are there for their purposes, and I sort of wonder, well, if you’re going to close an area down, well you close it down for everybody... back at Bow Valley Study time, when this was put forward to these folks they were astonished that that included them too”

Early on in our discussion we talked about the sorts of trail riding you do and the experiences you seek when you’re out on the trails. What I’d like you to do now is take three index cards from in front of you and write down three issues that prevent you from having the sorts of experiences you seek on these trails.

**Clarification: list the present issues or potential future issues that prevent you from having your desired experience.**

**F:** ① future government mandates (i.e.: closures) ② Bow Valley Study (closures, Johnson Lake area) ③ work (interrupts riding time) (humorous)

- when first moved here, could ride anywhere, that was a bit too lax, but now everything is closed because of science and politicking; fear of additional closures: “what’s left is in jeopardy as a result of our being here tonight”

- "Bow Valley Study was very negative... that's basically the whole reason we're all here, is to hear about additional closures...there were closures, and some of them made perfect sense... but we put up with it, and since then, it's gotten worse with each passing year: closing Assiniboine, Bryant Creek, you name it, Fish Creek in Lake Louise", these are based more on politics than on good science
- J:** wants to clarify the potential motivation for closures...
- I:** "wildlife corridors... wildlife-human interaction"
- J:** "we're talking about... interaction with the... larger carnivores... am I right in assuming that this is why we're sitting around talking about this... is that the problem?"
- M:** "I think it's a smokescreen... it's a nice fight to fight in Toronto, particularly in Hamilton Centre, to say 'Look what I've done for Parks Canada' where people don't understand, so we create a crisis with no votes to lose... I think it's absolutely a falsehood"
- F:** "Whatever you do here, Canmore's still where it is, from one valley to the other, so we can open up our whole bloody valley and just bottleneck it down at the other end and anybody who knows anything knows that's the way it is and it will never change. That golf course, Silvertip, that goes up the side of the mountain? That's one of our corridors and it's never going to go back into pristine land and be a corridor... same with the other side of the valley – Three Sisters... so I think whatever we do here is a waste of time except for those who are elected out East and don't have a Liberal vote to lose out here"
- C:** "But hopefully we're all here optimistically to interact with Parks Canada and have some input as to the direction ..."
- F:** (at the same time)"You've done this before, are you optimistic?"
- C:** "I am actually, but I'm disappointed in what's happened in the past certainly because I am

of the opinion that there was a certain amount of window dressing going on there, but I'm optimistic that it's possible to come to some sort of an amenable solution, some sort of concession that will please the greatest number, including the big furry guys, because I think that's probably the root of the problem"

- D:** there's nothing wrong with talking about wildlife corridors and determining what's needed for corridors in the area, "and I don't think it's fair to write off the whole Townsite Management Unit as it's shown there (refers to map of study area) because of Canmore being adjacent to the park... if you look at the Bow Valley Study, it didn't talk very much about mountain biking at all, it, in fact talked more about user restrictions. It was Parks Canada's management that took the approach of 'Let's restrict mountain bikes because it's really easy', so I think it's the politics angle that you guys need to take a look at"
- M:** "One of the most respected Wardens I know, talking about wildlife corridors, said 'It's all a wildlife corridor... it's a national park for Christ's sake', and so when you hang your hat on wildlife corridors, as everybody does, it's absolutely – almost ridiculous. We have an environmental lobby around here that – let's just say that everything they want to argue against is in the midst of a wildlife corridor... (agreement)... until it's time, of course, to build their own home, and then, lo and behold, there's that new housing development that isn't in a wildlife corridor"

#### (Joking and laughter)

- H:** "I think we all know that animals adapt quite fast, they've all adapted: the wolves have adapted, the elk have adapted, everything has adapted to people. People don't have to adapt to animals, the animals adapt to us just automatically"
- F:** "Greenpeace has their seals because they're cute, and the environmentalists have Banff because it's controversial, but Banff is two square miles and the park is 3,000 square miles, it's really blown out of proportion as far as corridors and what's going on, and to isolate this townsite as the

end-all and be-all in 3,000 square miles of park is a little bit ridiculous in the big picture.”

**M:** “If you look at aerial photographs of Banff from 1940 to 2000, the boundaries of the town have really grown very little and I would defy anybody to find another community in Canada that has grown less than Banff has in that 50-year period”; in that time people have become more sensitive to other users, but not able to get point across to Sheila

**G:** my card says politics of the environment, “it may appear to someone from the outside that these are a bunch of guys who are raping and pillaging the flora and the fauna on their bikes and they’re critical of *bona fide* scientists and environmentalists and Parks employees who have a true interest in the values of the park, but that’s not the case at all. We may argue against the politics of the environment – and I think intellectually you can do that forever – but at heart, everyone at this table, would be, in the big picture, an environmentalist. There’s a very healthy respect for the wilderness among this group. I think that’s where a lot of the emotion comes out that you’ve heard. It must be amazing for you to come in here from Winnipeg and right off the bat you’re being lambasted with these hypercritical professional people who are living in Banff. That’s where the hurt comes in, because we feel we’ve been targeted and I think that we’re quite concerned we’re going to get targeted again”

**G:** ① politics of the environment ② Parks Canada policy ③ trail closures

**M:** ① trail closures ② political decisions ③ bad science based on agendas

**D:** ① trail closures ② more trails needed ③ increasing use by carnivores of lands around town

**G:** Based on professional knowledge and work, “I would be curious to know, from you, does that mean that we shouldn’t go to these places, or does that mean that if we do go

there, there is going to be less of a problem?”

**D:** “I just have concerns that bears seem to be moving into the unoccupied habitat just now and wolves obviously have recolonised the valley here just two years ago and that there are much higher probabilities of running into those bears... in the Two Jack Area particularly... wolves don’t pose much of a danger to people, cougars: limited but there’s definitely a danger there”

**H:** “I think the closures are part of the problem why they’re close to the town”

**Clarification: is the issue the carnivores themselves, or the policies related to the carnivores?**

**D:** the carnivores and the management actions go together, Parks tries to protect carnivores whenever they come into conflict with humans

**F:** Parks Canada moved the elk out of the study area and created more problems, “they don’t react the way they used to, I mean, fifteen years ago, a problem bear comes in and ‘Oh God’ and it’s out of there”

**D:** “Fifteen years ago the problem bears were shot which is pretty much why the habitat was unoccupied (**laughter**). Now our policy is pretty different where we don’t shoot them, so instead we close it up and keep people out, well then the bear stays there... I think there’s a considerably enhanced risk of running into a bear”

**I:** “Since the Bow Valley Study they’ve actively tried to improve the corridors by the removal of the Boy Scout Camp...(unintelligible, multiple speakers) ... the Cadet Camp, sorry... so now the animals are reclaiming the territory?”

**D:** “It appears, in my mind, that they are”

**Scribe clarification: so your concern is for the public safety?**

**D:** “My concern is that, there’s the public safety aspect of it, it’s also that we’re going to lose riding areas, recreational areas because of the change in management”



**H:** ① Shilia (sic) Copps controlled by the enermmentlist (sic)

**E:** “Sheila Copps ‘out of control”

**F:** “She has no mandate, just headlines”

**J:** ① trail closures ② restrictions

**C:** ① trail closures ② restrictions ③ animal activity (the larger furry variety)

**Moderator clarification: Again, are you talking about the animals themselves, or the policies surrounding them?**

**C:** “Well, both actually”, was chased by bear last year “what a frightening experience, I’m concerned for the people who are out doing whatever in these areas”

**F:** “I find the warden service, I think, is more reactive than proactive, in the last five years. I’m not saying ‘Go and shoot the animals’, but, I mean, if there’s a problem bear there, and it’s not dealt with, it isn’t as effective as it used to be...(unintelligible)... I mean removal. We’re trying to co-exist with bears. Now what kind of a – who can do that in a townsite? I just – I don’t believe it. I don’t choose to do it. I was with C: on the encounter he’s speaking of and until you’ve been there for ten minutes – it’s the most frightening experience you’ve ever been in in your life. You just sit there and stare at the face of a grizzly bear. I used to ride alone a ton and I haven’t since that time – or I have very rarely – and its changed the way I ride, who I ride with, and how I ride. And that’s something that we’re faced with now and it’s part of Parks management, that’s, in my mind, directly attributable... it’s, again, the reactive to the proactive, they’re not trying to discourage the peripheral areas of town that don’t have bears, they’re trying to make these corridors, that don’t work in my mind”

**C:** if we had been walking there at that point in time, we might be in a similar situation, it’s not because of the mountain bikes

**G:** “This will be interesting – if we want to take the paranoia around the table – how this

issue could be interpreted by Parks. That would be that ‘There is a public safety concern. So there are wildlife in the area particularly grizzly bears, therefore, for the sake of safety of the public, including mountain bikers, you should not mountain bike in this area because you might meet a bear.’ That would be the obvious straight line solution – an answer to a problem – if these guys have a bear encounter, well, they shouldn’t go there because if they go there again they may have another bear encounter.”

**F:** “We had a bear encounter and we did the right things. The very next day... there was an encounter at the Nordic Centre in Canmore and ... there was a mauling. That’s the difference in my mind, of who’s out there: a person from town and the knowledge that we possess, which Joe Q. Rider comes to the park, gets his map and his handout, and goes out and tries the same thing, he’s going to be a stat and he’s going to end up closing the trail for the rest of us, just because of that rider’s knowledge”

**G:** “D:, correct me if I misinterpret what you’ve said, but I believe what your saying is that Parks management has led to bears being in this area, and then that leads to an encounter with a bear, which would then logically lead to closing that area, and these areas are getting closer to town... with a chain link fence... the animals aren’t too worried about it, they get under it, around it, over it... is that what you (are saying)?”

**D:** “Yes, but it’s more complicated than just Parks making wildlife corridors. Last year about six bears showed up in (unintelligible) area, and this year, about three, but before, we’d have probably eight, so it’s more complicated than just wildlife programmes. There’s lots of other factors too.”

**J:** “I think of the big picture too, it’s not really just that parks management has allowed them to be there, that that is their natural environment and we have reduced our pressure to discourage them from being in that area. And in coming to this town many of us expected that pressure to be there, but it’s a normal lifestyle and opportunity to go out and do things in the way that other people do in other towns and sometimes we

lose the recognition that being in a national park, there are certain things that are going to be different for us"

**I:** ① environmental politics ② lack of public participation ③ Her Majesty the Queen

- Queen is the landowner, "legislation is there so that the Superintendent with the wave of his hand can obliterate us all tomorrow by passing a Superintendent's Order – perhaps with no reason at all – without any effective input from us"

**H:** Within a quarter of a kilometre of where there was an encounter there's a campground with 2,000 people in it, so why close the mountain biking trail but keep the campground open in the closed off area?

**E:** most who live here realise it's a privilege to live where among grizzly bears, cougars, wolves, etc., but living amongst them, "sometimes, results in a bad experience"

**C:** several bear encounters, all others have been very positive

**E:** frustrating, it's a privilege [referring to their recognizing and appreciating that it's a privilege to live in a National park], but it "doesn't prevent us from being targeted"

**A:** ① trail restrictions ② lack of public participation ③ restricting when I can ride

**B:** ① closure ② restricting ③ crowding on trails

- crowding on trails: appreciate how quiet the trails are compared to Kananaskis Country, fear of potential future crowding in Banff
- "I know that Parks Canada is really faced with trying to balance different mandates: providing protection to species while providing recreational opportunities. It's something that we're struggling with to some point because it seem like in enforcing wildlife management has really expanded the area of potential carnivore environment, but now its starting to push into more and more human conflict"; mentions case of the High Line Trail, they accept certain level of required awareness, living in the Canadian Rockies, but is the onus on the user to cut

risks, or is Parks concerned about legal liability?

**E:** Parks current management doesn't want to get bad press, management decisions are made to keep its name out of the press.

**J:** Lawsuit was filed over Columbia Icefields incident, since settled out of court...

**F:** ... and at Lake Louise with the bear...

**I:** ... there's a pretty strong case for negligence there, as there is at Whiskey Creek, where they knew the bear was in the area and it was a hazard bear... a tranquillised bear from Revelstoke that was relocated...

**E:** Parks can't manage out of fear of litigation

**I:** "They will use any excuse"

**D:** we should clarify difference between permanent vs. temporary closures

**J:** need equity of trail access between users, all must be addressed fairly, and eliminate situations like at Bryant Creek: eliminating one group and putting no restrictions on another

#### **Issues as grouped by participants**

- future government mandates (i.e.: closures)
- Her Majesty the Queen
- Parks Canada policy
- Political decisions
- Shilia (sic) Copps controlled by the enermentlist (sic)
- Time (restrict activity and enjoyment of the park)
- Work (interrupts riding time)
- increasing carnivore use of lands adjacent
- animal activity (the larger furry variety)
- lack of public participation
- need more trails
- crowding
- trail closures

- trail closures
- trail closures by Parks
- trail restriction
- restrictions
- trail closures & restrictions (past, current, and future)
- closures
- closure
- closing local trails that I can ride to
- restricting when I can ride
- bad science based on agendas
- environmental politics
- politics of the environment
- Bow Valley Study (closures – Johnson Lake)

If you had one minute to speak to senior park management, what would you say?

**F:** "Leave us alone"

**H:** "Relax"

**A:** "Don't create problems"

**I:** "Don't be driven by environmental politics"

**E:** "In the state of Pennsylvania, don't they say 'Don't Tread On Me'? Ours is, 'Don't Tread on my Treads'" **(laughter)**

**H:** "Closures are creating problems, not helping the problems"

**C:** "Work toward educating, particularly the transient population" who aren't aware of the issues, transient/seasonal workers are probably "the majority of the mountain biking population"

**E:** "Parks Canada has pretty much transparently been hijacked by the biological branch, the historical/heritage branch is almost non-existent, and the public recreation aspect of parks is so far down the list it's really forgotten" and so Parks has been "co-opted to a single voice", points out merits of pedal power as ecologically sensitive

**B:** Would like to see mountain biking recognised as an acceptable activity in Parks

**C:** The history of their experiences has led to strong views tonight, but many cyclists share views with parks, fall into "both camps" of recreationists and environmentalists

**H:** "It's not us against them, it's them against us, basically"

**F:** "The idea of environmentalists cutting down live trees... goes against what you're doing, in some sense".

**H:** "I do think that some of these environmentalists really think this park is their own private back yard and nobody else should be in it except for them. And they're getting all these big bucks for doing studies that my 88-year old grandmother could figure out"

**E:** "Part of the problem is, in Ottawa, there's no recognition yet – after 106 years that the park has been here – that Banff happens to sit on the Trans-Continental Railway and the Trans-Canada Highway. It's a completely different national park than the rest of the national parks in Canada... and a city of one million people less than an hour away, and that results in a whole array of management issues that require proper management, but also a recognition of Banff as being a different kind of Park. My own feeling is that if they had a brain in their head they could use Banff as the engine to fuel the rest of the national park system. We could have the best national park system in the world based on revenues generated from Banff... instead of that, the money that's generated from this damned park goes into General Revenue... instead of going to other national parks"

**D:** Would ask the superintendent to actively endorse mountain biking as an acceptable activity in the park, including fully understanding the activity, its users, their motivations, and types of trails they'd need; "I think there could be more trails in the park"

**F:** Should trails be promoted to others trail riders in Canada?

**D:** Yes, it's a national park, it's their park; "it's our park too, but it's not just our park"

**F:** "But if it's actively promoted, you're inviting a whole major issue, or you're going to make an issue out of something that currently isn't."

**H:** "A very small percentage of people would use it, though"

**D:** It depends on the skill level of the users, and the information and type of trails in maps would have to allow riders to "self-select" the most appropriate trail for them... suspects that shops in town are promoting trails to riders who ask (based on skill level desired)

Women and children, into criminals, because we're not going to stop riding"

**J:** Can't explain to most riders how to navigate the myriad lefts, rights, and junctions, would have to show them; also, problem with people out on trails who aren't prepared

**H:** Problem is that that's the only trail open to them, so everyone's sent there, regardless of their skill level; also, conflict at Hoodoos to Douglas Firs, or Bow Falls to Campground, because hikers and bikers are pushed onto the same trails, that's where conflict comes in.

**Group ended at 9:32**

**E:** "If Parks continues on the course that they've been going on, they're going to turn people like us, professional people from all around town, including their own employees,

**Recreational Use of the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff  
Summary of Discussions**

**Focus Group #3: Banff Community Services Advisory Council**

6:00-7:30 p.m., Tuesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2001      Multipurpose Room, Banff YWCA, Banff, AB  
Five Participants

Moderator: Dave McVetty      Scribe: Melissa Mauro

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**Let's go around the table and tell everybody a bit about yourself, your relationship to the Community Services Advisory Council, and the role that the lands adjacent to the Banff townsite play in the life of the community.**

**A:** a member of the Community Services Advisory Council (CSAC)

- the lands adjacent are important for recreational use and at the same time are responsible for protecting wildlife and "all that is indigenous to the area"; need a balance to allow protection and access for people
- no particular area stands out as being more important than any other area

**B:** Town of Banff employee in Community Services

- 22-year resident of Banff, "trails out my backdoor are one of the big draws"; "you can live anywhere and play hockey or soccer, but you can do all these things here"
- the role of Community Services' recreational offerings is to balance what residents can't get from / in the Park
- day use areas are heavily used by residents
- the Vermilion Lakes project is exciting and will allow enhanced use of the area – but it is on hold now
- Sheila Copps' reduced footprint for the townsite is a concern
- concern with encroachment on town lands, flora and fauna by "mountain biking crazy guys" who create a public safety hazard
- also has personal and professional issues with commercial horse guide operations: are there two sets of rules for horse guides and other legitimate companies (who face a lot of obstacles)?; town is drawn into the politics of these situations and resents Parks "picking up the tab for cost of an private operator doing stuff on trails"

**C:** 41-year resident of Banff, adult son "bikes lots" in the study area (seeks clarification of study area)

- residents frequently use Cascade, Spray Loop, Vermilion Lakes; it is important that these areas can be accessed by car for older residents who can then walk (no benches at Vermilion Lakes – why not? It would not hurt aesthetics of the park to have them); seniors unwilling to walk in crowded areas (Banff Avenue) for fear of being knocked over
- would like to see better access including a pedestrian bridge over the Bow River between Central Park and the Recreation Grounds; not "Sheila and Dennis Shuler's gondola over Banff"
- now has a problem going to Sundance Canyon; very lonely spot, not very busy anymore, area has "lost its allure" because of a fear of bears

**D:** born in Banff, "liked it so much I never really left", works with Community Services, responsible for municipal trails, upgrades, and maintenance standards, in response to the "Banff Trails and Open Space Study" (1992), which provided an inventory of trails, conditions, signage, and recommendations

- lands adjacent are important for the environment and "opportunities for getting out onto the trails"
- concern over change in National Parks Act giving primacy to ecological integrity... "leads to decisions that are difficult for people to swallow"
- "people who live here expect to be able to go out"
- "there's a real need here for common sense"
- a few areas are off-limits, e.g.: it looks as though Parks may be planning on closing the Buffalo underpass

- Banff residents are good observers of nature, have good background information on these areas, so are limits really needed?
- can see the need of season and wildlife-related restrictions for things like wolf denning, elk movement
- but it's frustrating "when you haven't seen animals wander there for 15 years, and suddenly it's closed"
- "are there areas that can be semi-sacrifice areas" in order to save others that are more important?
- **concern** with "hard core mountain biking" that creates problems in the townsite, like Bow Falls area that is now "trashed"
- feels that people respect the Fairholme Bench [i.e., the voluntary closure]
- municipal trails make natural connections to Parks' trails, but more directional signage on the Parks Canada side would be helpful
- participant worked with Parks Canada to do signage that directed people from town trails onto Park trails. Town did their part, but Parks did not do – didn't put up signage to direct people in the other direction
- **concern** that Sundance road is "falling into the river", it was the only place accessible by roller-blades and wheelchairs, but it is no longer accessible
- **concern** that Tunnel Mountain has a huge area impacted by mountain bikes, but nothing has been done (hardening, reduction in cycling use, etc.)
- are there any trails close to town that Parks Canada is "writing off?", perhaps because there is no money to maintain them?

**E:** Town of Banff employee in Community Services

- the trails adjacent to the townsite are "absolutely critical to the community", notably Fenland Trail, Spray, Johnson Lake, Sulphur, and Vermilion Lakes
- many tourists don't get off Banff Avenue, but there is real beauty a 15-minute walk away... better signage may direct them to the trails
- Parks Canada not thinking much about the ageing population, the paved trails to Sundance and Vermilion Lakes are "treacherous"

- Parks needs to do something about backcountry mountain bikers, "they want to go wherever they want to go", mentions Tunnel Mountain trail degradation

**Moderator: is it all mountain bikers, or are there different types of riders?**

- Banff is a unique community... what some do for fun in other places, many Banff residents have dedicated, hardcore commitment.

**B:** the "downhillers decked out in their Darth Vader gear are doing the most damage"  
**(agreement around the table)**

Now, please pick up a pen and index card from in front of you. Responding as a person involved in community services for the Town of Banff, I'd like you to write down the first things that come to mind when I say "trail management."

**A:** surveying, mapping, demarcation, maintenance, advertising

- surveying: thought put into trail designs
- mapping: topographic maps are important to direct people and to help them avoid getting lost
- marked trails: people know where they're going, including length, difficulty, level
- maintenance: keep it passable and safe
- advertising: brochures for out-of-towners to choose the right trails
- participant viewed these as steps to be followed in developing / managing a trail network

**B:** maintenance, regulations, signage, planning, development/construction, promotion, evaluation, risk management

- recently had a risk management meeting with insurers

**C:** clear of fallen trees, fine gravel; well marked; notices if dangerous (animals, weather wet or ice) distances to areas; grading (easy, moderate, difficult); time to take

- fine gravel: e.g. Tunnel Mountain trail dangerous due to erosion and resulting gravel on trail

- need for directional signage; K-country does a good job with signage: information on distances and directions
- we've turned into a society of shoppers, Parks Canada needs somehow to encourage people to walk, maybe with brochures... does Parks still hand out walking trail info at the gate? (they should)

**D:** 1. physical situation- what shape is it in? need fixing? maintenance? 2. people (numbers); 3. use – shared – multi – single; 4. logical linkages; 5. signage

- numbers of people: are trails designed for heavy use? are people managed (like at Lake O'Hara)?
- type of use: single or multi use? how managed is the trail (or lack thereof)?

**E:** upkeep; budgeting; signage; safety; joint users; zones; animals

- budgeting: it seems that Parks Canada has stopped budgeting for trail maintenance
- safety: Parks Canada is not attending to all the requirements it should
- multi-use: trails have blind corners and pedestrians may run into cyclists
- safety: Parks Canada should communicate where animals are and when they are dangerous
- zones: Parks Canada may consider using zones "radiating from the town centre"; those within a two-hour walk may have benches and garbage containers; but those beyond a four-hour walk don't need these things

Again, I will ask you to take three index cards and the pen in front of you. Earlier, you each described the importance of the lands adjacent to the townsite to the residents of Banff.

Can you list three issues that get between residents and their ideal use of the adjacent lands?

Answer from your Community Services perspective, but also from your personal perspective. When you are done, stick them on the white board close to other cards that seem to have the same theme.

**B:** ① public safety; ② accessibility; ③ budget

- public safety: includes wildlife management and trail conditions

- accessibility: three aspects to the issue – (1) connections between town and park trails; (2) trail options for people of all ages and abilities; and (3) not closing all trails.
- budget: lack of appropriate budget to maintain trails, sign trails, or build new connections

**E:** ① good signage; ② amenities; ③ maintenance

- good signage: information about the trail is needed at the start (length, time, degree of difficulty)
- amenities: e.g.: dog poop bag dispensers
- maintenance: public safety and budget issues

**C:** ① choose "scenic value" trails; ② accessibility; ③ public safety

- scenic value: very important to consider when developing trails
- accessibility: quick and easy to get to, car parking available
- public safety: maintenance, wildlife; Safety, concerns about other people out at night, going under the bridge at night (but this is quite a bit better since the vagrants' accommodation has been filled in)

**E:** discusses with **D:** that if there's not a light under there now, there should be one

**A:** ① budget; ② planned emergency response; ③ surveying

- e.g.: wardens and RCMP carrying out climbing rescues
- surveying: wardens need to have a presence in the park to "keep an eye on what wildlife and people are doing" (i.e., monitoring)

**D:** ① maintenance; ② what to do about hard core mountain bikers; ③ users vs. Parks mandate

- hard core bikers: Parks needs to look at the bigger picture – whole Bow Valley (what BCEAG is supposed to be doing) – realize that what they do affects areas outside of the park; e.g.: bikers used to ride down Mt. Norquay, but it was closed to them, so they were displaced to Lady MacDonald in Canmore

- mandate: not sure how to deal with this without getting into closures everywhere

**E:** the Parks Canada approach is very linear, rather than systematic, so they don't consider all variables

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**Now that we've described some of the issues in the study area, can you indicate if these issues are particular to the townspeople in Banff, to visitors, or to both?**

**D:** signage and access is more for visitors, as residents usually know this already

**E:** safety and maintenance are important to both

- when something happens (i.e., a trail closure or use restriction) residents, whether or short-term or long-term residents are impacted more than visitors

**D:** it makes people wonder "why did I come here?"

**Moderator: short-term and long-term residents... is there a difference between how these groups use the lands in the study area?**

**B:** yes, "transients don't have the same appreciation for where we are," in this national park; "they're here for a good time, not a long time," and "don't contribute or participate in policy development"; they have their impact and then leave; long-term residents are impacted and have watched access being removed, so they have more involvement

**E:** the transients "haven't made Banff their home, haven't identified with the community"

**C:** "ponders down the road, transients might reflect on the special qualities of the areas" in the parks, wouldn't "short change kids and the value of this place"; "we keep closing off these spaces and shoving them downtown, yet want them to enjoy areas", this is a dichotomy; perhaps business owners want them in town to spend money

- it was a mistake to allow the townsite in the park and a mistake to move to private interpretation

**E:** Parks Canada let go of the opportunity to reach people directly, only Parks programme is at Vermilion Lakes

**C:** the interp programme at Vermilion Lakes is so boring... it takes two hours to get to the first lake, "I see them looking at me whizzing past and know they want to be with us instead", Parks needs to ask people what they want and make it exciting to capture people, "there's nothing worse than standing for 15 minutes"

Are there any areas within the study area that serve the community particularly well?

**E:** Cascade Pits (agreement from around the table)

**D:** there's a difference between summer and winter; skating at Vermilion Lakes in winter is very popular, not like canoeing in the summer (far fewer); the safety issues for skating are new to Wardens

- in summer Cory is not an issue, it's too steep for mountain biking and further from town

**E:** repave all of the paved trails, perhaps close Vermilion to traffic after the first lake parking lot

**C:** (strong disagreement) that would be sad, how will older people visit there? many are frightened to walk down Banff Avenue because it's too busy and people zigzag all over and they're afraid of being knocked over

**E:** "Johnson Lake is in jeopardy of being loved to death" by locals (agreement around the room), Parks Canada needs to look at it

**D:** but what do you do? close it? what's the solution?

(At this point someone commented on the viewing platform and stairs that are being constructed at Surprise Corner and asked "who is doing that good work?". Comments indicated that participants viewed this work positively). In these areas that serve the community well, how much of it is due to management by Parks Canada and how much of it is due to other circumstances?



- D:** "I really don't know if there is any management on those trails"
- E:** "I've never seen a warden" in that area
- C:** "I've seen a Warden just *flying* down to the end of the Vermilion Road and back"
- B:** "I see wildlife management, but nothing else"
- D:** notice new picnic shelters at Minnewanka, very nice
- E:** the last concrete management intervention I'm aware of is the fencing at the top of Tunnel Mountain
- A:** never sees wardens around
- D:** dogs on leash is patrolled, but that's "not really management... it's keeping people out"
- E:** the danger level of trails near the townsite is a big concern, e.g.: Tunnel Mountain trail is very dangerous right after you leave the road, loose gravel and rivulets pose a danger to seniors or people with babies on their backs

**Scribe: Are there any trails within the town boundaries that in your view have been affected by how trails adjacent to the town boundary are used or managed – ie, trails in the Park?**

- D:** the horse concessionaire
- the snails near Cave & Basin were on his route; "so [when Parks Canada closed the area] Parks Canada built a goofy parallel trail next to the one he already had near the Recreation Grounds so a one-way loop to the Cave & Basin would be possible"
  - Parks forced the town to give over land to the horse concessionaire – literally forced – I was told "it was not an option for the town to say no"; the town had been compromised
  - trees were cut in an environmentally sensitive area, now there's less of a buffer between the pedestrian and horse trails and when the new trail gets muddy, horses use the pedestrian trail

**E:** horses start in town to access the Parks trails, so the town has had to build their trails up to horse traffic standards to accommodate Parks' policies

**B:** Yet when the Middle Springs closure cut off the connector trails out to the Cave and Basin and Sundance no alternative trails were provided for local users; and visitors end up in the middle of nowhere and no way out because of the dead ends

Suppose that you had one minute to talk to the managers at Parks Canada about trail management. What would you say?

**E:** "start managing your trails", safety is most important

**A:** agrees, wonders if Parks Canada has any upgrades planned in the near future

– if not, agrees with first comment

**D:** "designate some people with common sense to solve the problem", try to compromise, recognise the reality of local users needing to use local lands, using the direction of the best science available to manage some areas for less use; less "knee-jerk reaction to 'just close it'"

– find some good examples of co-existence to look at

**Moderator: what do you mean by common sense?**

– e.g.: realise that elk are more adaptable than grizzly bears and that some areas are more important than others

**C:** has nothing to say, "it's so obvious"

– really wishes Parks Canada would look at its interpretive department again, wonders "why do they take enjoyment away from us?"

**B:** since Parks Canada is hopping on the Heritage Tourism Strategy bandwagon; "put your money where your mouth is"; get back to original intent of the National Parks Act and recognise that this is a place for people too; not protection for wildlife at all costs at the exclusion of people; "come back to finding balance"

– find opportunities for trade-offs; seasonal closures are good; public education to explain that the rationale is good; why not

collaborate with the community rather than  
take a single approach?; more public  
involvement would help.

**Group ends at 7:30 p.m.**

## Recreational Use of the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff

### Summary of Discussions

#### Focus Group #4: Banff Light Horse Association

8:00-9:30 p.m., Tuesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2001 Multipurpose Room, Banff YWCA, Banff, AB

Fourteen Participants

Moderator: Dave McVetty

Scribe: Melissa Mauro

Early discussion about focus groups and the planning process (and timelines) for the Lands Adjacent study.

Let's go around the table and tell everybody a bit about yourself, and your use of the area shown here in the map. (Probe: tell us about your ideal ride.)

**M:** a former Parks Canada employee; has 2 horses and 3 young children who also ride; did some backcountry riding for Parks, for last few years does mostly 2-3 hour rides from town

**E:** former trails manager for Parks Canada, riding is a long-time activity; occasionally rides with family at the corrals

**H:** a BLHA member for many years, has been riding for entire life; has trained show horses that competed at the Nationals; "rides a fair horse", but likes to stop and chat with hikers and bikers; typically takes 1-3 hour trips to the East Gate or Healy Creek areas; feels privileged to be able to ride in a national park

**P:** lived 25 years in Banff; a "weekend cowboy", rides usually for 1-4 hours, objective is recreation, often rides with spouse; out to Elk Trap is a great ride – but depends: generally stays within a couple of hours of the corral; notes there are not many recreation opportunities for Banff residents

**B:** a former Parks Canada employee and member of the Light Horse Association for 12 years, typically does 1-3 hours of corral riding, sometimes on the trails in family groups at the corrals; feels that riding is an alternative use for a "sustainable community environment", and is "very much part of the community"; long-term use of shorter trails is significant to us

**G:** a 25-year resident of Banff who has been riding that long; typically 1-3 hour rides after

work every night; notes that riding opportunities are limited from the new corral location; trails are too concentrated, feels appropriate trails should be re-opened because riding doesn't impact wildlife as much as other activities; occasionally takes a trailer out to the Kananaskis Country backcountry because it's easier to ride: tie stalls, don't have to haul different kinds of hay, don't need permits, and trailer parking is provided

**S:** Parent of Me:, not a rider, thankful the Me: has opportunity to ride; concern is for riders' safety at new location near highway and railroad (**agreement around table**)

**G:** car drivers are not aware of horses' behaviour and so they don't do the right thing around horses; trains are very hard to hear on corner of tracks near the corral

**Me:** teenaged child of S:, rides around the corrals, doesn't trailer to other locations, but doesn't feel safe around cars and trains in present location; ideal ride is a couple of hours, with no trains, and away from a highway where cars don't stop

**Br:** a lifelong resident of Banff and current employee of Parks Canada; spouse of D; two children who also ride; feels the new corral location wasn't well planned regarding: horses and bikes both on the same trails and also regarding accessing traditional riding areas of the park like Cascade and Johnson Lake; notes conflict with non-traditional bike use

**Moderator:** Could you clarify what you mean by non-traditional bike use?

**Br:** they prefer steep areas, uses a non-designated network or trails, but they are "in the same boat as we are," wanting to ride in areas near town

- Gi:** a new member of the Association (few years) who rides daily with daughter; uses the ring and gets out on trails about twice a week; the train is a concern, but grateful to have an area (**nods from a few around the table**); ideal ride is 3-4 hours with people who know the area well (note: participant was accompanied by a school-aged child)
- D:** 20-year member of the Association, spouse of Br.; concerned with relocation and the safety issues, rides less on trails because it is too dangerous in the new location; signs for crossing the highway don't work and cars don't understand horses; feels it's "not an issue of if there's going to be an accident, but how serious its going to be"; ideal ride is at Two Jack and Johnson, or used to be, as these areas are no longer open
- J:** has three horses with "lots of mileage", rides with spouse, usually in corral area, 1-5 times per week, trailers on weekends to Kananaskis Country or elsewhere in Banff National Park backcountry; wants Parks Canada to look at the impact of the Association since its lease limits it to 132 horses maximum (3 horses each in 44 corrals and they are below that now); the corrals are a social, family spot; considers riding to be a healthy use of the environment
- H:** concerned that children are growing up and will soon be riding in hazardous areas
- D:** (checks records) the club has 42 children registered
- De:** an Association 'basic' member (i.e., rides other peoples' horses for them) for the last five years; a great ride is going with friends, cantering, trotting, riding hills, and seeing a variety of new areas
- Ja:** has lived 29 years in Banff, rides almost every day; active with the association in 1970's and 1980's, now active again in last three years; rides almost daily; work requires being on-call, so often in the arena on work days, but takes 4-9 hour trips on off days; has had a trailer for 11 months; does most riding in the study area. Rides from the corrals but also trailers to Bow Falls to ride at Golf Course (Warner's trails), Spray and riverside (Brewster trails); sees riding as a central part of summer existence; notes

that looking after a horse is a significant responsibility and that members are lovers of the town and the park; notes that horses "opened up the park" and the Association carries on the tradition and that there was more horse use 100 years ago than now, free access to everywhere important; the group here tonight are the most active riders in the Association; reiterates point that membership is small and so impact is low compared to others; "every single interaction with mountain bikers" has been good: they are courteous and ask for direction from him re: what to do

Now, please pick up a pen and index card from in front of you. I'm going to say something and I'd like you to react to it by writing the first few words or phrases that come to mind. "Trail Management"

**M:** limited use

- (**many nods and laughter**) mentions quotas, putting up tape and barricades, reference to the Banff Bow Valley Study

**E:** concern about numbers

- concerned about numbers of people and their impact on the environment

**H:** grooming and repairing

- reference to Calgary and to how different groups are separated on different trail networks

**P:** use-limit, maintenance, creation

- creation: suggests new trails, or making trails available again

**B:** human use, multi use, conditions/safety

- human use could be more or less, multiple users, including cyclists and hikers, and everybody should have an opportunity to use the trails

**G:** clearing trails of deadfall, garbage; repairing erosion; bridges; signs; limited use – maximum #'s on trails

- specifically mentions "garbage from hikers"

**S:** environment presentations, impact on users on trails; balancing different users needs

- no discussion

**Me:** trails open and closed; safe ones; not so safe ones; which are shared

- knowing which trails are open to riders, safe to use, and that others can use too

**Br:** designated; restrictions; closures; multi-use; single-use; monitored; studies; maintained; signed

- this response from a Parks Canada employee comes from a management planning perspective

**Gi:** co-operation; user-friendly; shared interests

- shared interests of trail users: we have to take care, need trail management in the area
- e.g. of sharing: take care to go through one side of the wildlife underpasses so the track pads are not messed up

**D:** closure (fear of); want to know why; ecological?; wildlife issue to protect; safety-wildlife/human

- wants to know why some areas are closed, and if it is justifiable, then close it

**J:** limited use or reduced use of trails; control of - closure; ecology - managing all disciplines; maintenance, signage

- limited use: fear of something being taken away
- wildlife vs. human use: the ecological point of view has to be considered and balanced with human use
- maintenance: trails should be welcoming, with signs pointing the way
- all activities should be managed, while listening to all and their shared and differing interests

**D:** maintaining; monitoring use

- maintaining trails, e.g.: holes that horses can get stuck in
- monitoring use: counting use of different types

**Ja:** over regulation; lacking proper information; quota imposition

- limiting people: e.g., has been management strategy used on the West Coast Trail

**Br:** there's lots of talk of enforcement and rules, but who's going to enforce rules?

**B:** with regards to regulatory aspects, there is an opportunity to improve the trail experience by limiting the number of people; remember the human experience of crowding, not just the environmental impacts

**P:** we have a fixed number of corrals already, hopefully because of small groups, more trails would become available to the Association

**J:** wonders if there are statistics on the number of people trailering into Banff National Park, as there are no visitor corrals; trailheads are not set up for it here; points out that you never see anyone you don't know at a trailhead, so there are not likely many non-locals riding the trails; the season is from June 1 to September 30, so the impact is likely minimal

#### (nods around the group)

**G:** the backcountry is not made easy for visitors to use for horseback riding; "I would never have seen as much of the backcountry on my own two feet as I have been able to from the back of horses through my jobs in the backcountry or doing trips with other people"; don't have the stamina, not a hiker, don't bike anymore

**P:** riding allows locals a quickly accessed experience in the backcountry, an escape from tourism for locals, etc.; recreational use just as is a bicycle or skateboard

- wary of "trail management" as it conjures up images of Big Brother watching

**H:** in the 1950's there were no restrictions, now there are areas where you can't ride

**D:** within this group, trail management perceived in negative content because of past experience

**Moderator:** Is there a concern that more outside riders may come into Banff to ride?

**J:** not an issue, just a comment; Banff National Park doesn't have the facilities that trailering horseback riders need, but Kananaskis Country does, so they go there

- we feel privileged because we have horses here and many other people don't have the opportunity

**P:** we are fortunate to have the horse facilities on-site; our number will always be limited, therefore, we are largely self-controlled

**B:** from the Banff National Park perspective: there is a history of horse use in the park; Parks Canada did not develop anything on its own [in this area]

- contrast this with Jasper, where the horse club looks after visiting riders and trail head set up for horses
- in the past 15-20 years, there has been a movement not to encourage horse use in Banff National Park

**Ja:** horse users read the brochures for Banff National Park and they make it look daunting to plan a trip here – must comply with lots of regulations, etc. – that creates a perception among Albertans that it's not worth it, or a false perception that horses are not allowed in Banff

Again, I will ask you to take two index cards and the pen in front of you. Earlier, you each described your ideal ride in the study area. Please list two issues that get between you and your ideal experience (one per card).

**B:** 1. Wildlife corridor closure to human use  
2. Trans-Canada highway fence

- Overpass/underpass issue;
- access issues: wildlife displacement and future issues

**P:** 1. Safety – access

- says exactly same as B: wildlife corridors and closures
- plus safety and concern for young riders

**D:** niece had an accident and broke her arm when her horse was spooked on Tunnel Mountain by a bus; mountain bikers also come down this trail and this could lead to an accident too; there is nowhere safe for

children because of the train tracks and blind corner; her children don't ride trails anymore, only at the corral

**Group discusses safety issue of train and the bend at the new corral location: hard to hear trains, distinguish them from trucks on highway because of echoes, wind, etc.**

**D:** is Parks Canada considering closing more trails? we don't see that there are conflicts with other user groups – but who knows what they're thinking on the other side, hopefully that's not it

**B:** points out that in discussion so far lots of people saying that there is no issue with mountain bikes, but "What I'm hearing is we **do** have an issue with bikes... and I do"

**D:** has two special requests: 1) close the trail up Tunnel Mountain to bikes and 2) [second request did not come out here]

**J:** observations from Kananaskis Country: bikes and horses people are more aware of each other, in Banff National Park, bikers aren't aware of horse users' concerns or horse behaviours; sometimes you get horses going up and bikers coming down the same hill: maybe should look at the direction of use allowed by bikes?; horses think and therefore are unpredictable

**J:** there is way more visitor use of trails on the Spray side (south side) and so its more difficult there with bikers because they don't know the etiquette around horses

**Group discusses safety issues further, with personal anecdotes of close calls and near injuries while riding.**

Now I'd like everybody to put their cards up on the white board. Group them thematically if you wish and we'll discuss them. But before we go any further, I'd like to clarify the discussion of cyclists. Are we talking about all cyclists on the trails, or only certain ones?

**Ja:** there is a subculture of downhill cyclists; their equipment is made for fast downhill use and is very heavy; they wear motorcycle gear; at the World Cup level they go 50-55 mph down rocky mountainsides; they are very different from cross-country riders

- downhillers were a factor in the Mt. Norquay closures; heavy use, getting towed up by vans, come screaming down; these are younger people who are less compliant with regulations

**B:** the narrower, rougher trails are less of a problem because the bikes have to move slower; but at the Hoodoos the trails are wide and they go very fast; perhaps could make trails rougher?

**H:** Glenmore was for equestrian use, but now is multi-use; they created paved bike trails, unpaved horse trails, and another for pedestrians, they separated use to reduce conflict

**G:** there are no bells on these bikes, on blind corners they don't make any noise; also, animals smell horses and react

**Participants' issues (they were not grouped thematically)**

- Safety – access
- Trans-Canada Highway fence
- Wildlife corridor closure to human use
- Any closure of trails presently open
- Re-open the Johnson Lake Eastwood trail and the Powerline Trail from Johnson Lake
- Safety issue at the Cascade Underpass can be greatly improved as well as the Banff Avenue crossing
- Continued varied riding terrain
- Safe access to our trails
- Decent trails to trot & canter on with easier accessibility
- Be able to go on a fairly long ride without repeating the same trails over and over again
- Safety: I don't want to cross the tracks & if I have to then a safe place to cross
- I don't want to cross the highway, but if I have to then more signs so people will stop
- Train crossings: limited use of trails and what are they
- Highway crossing
- Management regulations reduced usage
- Current issue at new location safety

- Location of corrals hemmed in by highway, railway, Tunnel Mountain Road, and very busy campground. There is no safe access to all the wonderful trails.
- Safety Safety. Open King George Highway to horse use please. Close trail up to Tunnel Mountain to bikes please. Reopen Johnson Lake trails.
- Safety. The crossing of the tracks has the potential to be our greatest liability
- Trail closures limited use to all – hiker – biker – horse = congestion
- Trail closures severely limit my rides. Since my impact on trails is minimal – with regards to damage/erosion, context with wildlife (they hear us coming a long way off and they are not usually afraid of horses with riders). Closures to horses with no explanations.
- Making sure the trails are safe. Trails marked for bikers to be aware of horses.
- Safety – issue trains highway
- Closure of essential underpasses 1) Buffalo Paddock 2) Cascade River

**Moderator: Is there anything on the board that we haven't covered in our discussion?**

**P:** horseback riding has a limited season, which is reflected in a low impact on the area; hiking and biking have longer seasons

**J:** horseback riding is also limited to trail use

**G:** we don't ride in the winter

**E:** horses and wildlife get along, "horses are the most compatible"

**Ja:** a horse has less shock value for wildlife than other animals or other types of backcountry access, this includes for bears; horses are more afraid of elk than other animals

**P:** now that there are fewer elk in the area, horses are even more unfamiliar with them

**M:** but elk are not concerned with horses

**Ja:** coyotes are not concerned with horses

**D:** trails to be reopened: King George Highway, which was closed, but not to bikers, why?,

it's a safe trail with access to miles of other trails...

**Ja:** and it can be used to make a loop with other trails

**Group discussed trail link opportunities and there was general agreement with the point.**

**J:** re-open trails away from Johnson Lake, as swimmers don't like horse crap near the lake; Cascade Ponds is an example of how we have adjusted use to respect others' needs; notes that terrain variety "is very important to us"

**D:** we have no desire to ride next to the lakes anyway

**J:** "One door opens and another closes" is what we've seen in previous management; this is not necessarily good, as it doesn't take into account the bigger picture

**D:** Is there ongoing analysis of the Johnson Lake area? I.e.: wolves may be a good reason for closure, but is that being monitored and reviewed?

Suppose that you had one minute to talk to the senior managers at Parks Canada about trail management. What would you say?

**D:** "Move us back to the old site."

**Gi:** seeks clarification on moving the corrals – is it a done deal? Is it open to discussion with Parks?

**P:** we would like input into the decision-making, but there is a perception that the decisions were made before the discussion happened; I may be wrong, but any future decisions should involve stakeholders

**B:** negative reference to Sheila Copps; there is a distinct difference between horse use and other types of backcountry use from wildlife perspective; wildlife in Banff National Park are used to horses; better science would investigate and distinguish between different types of use, e.g.: Mattson's Yellowstone model; we should put more money into research to identify use that is more compatible with wildlife

**H:** the Banff Bow Valley Study said that horse use is appropriate

**J:** Parks should revisit what they do, e.g.: as they did by making changes in elk management; King George Highway closed because of a study at a certain time... this needs to be revisited at different times, there should be a process in place to review or revisit research

**H:** reads written statement (attached)

**D:** requests:

- no bike sign for trail from the hay shed to top of Tunnel
- King George opened, to give safe access to other routes
- reopen trails behind Johnson Lake
- research the best ways to safely cross the highways and railroad

**G:** Stop congestion of everyone (bikes, hikers, horses, etc.) on Tunnel Mountain and the Hoodoos past the campgrounds; erosion has increased from all this concentration of use; have fewer people on the trails because more people lead to more problems

**J:** Parks Canada felled trees at Johnson Lake for the sake of wildlife [referring to discouraging human use of trails], but the animals have to get around them too so they have created new trails; people have also created new trails to get around too, has led to trail braiding

**H:** reopen the Johnson Lake trails

**E:** wolves have been there for the past 20 years; just because someone comes in and does one study all of sudden there's this wolf issue

**Comment from unidentified participant:**  
we need more science

**J:** Johnson should be reopened; the Fairholme area has human history and horses are part of that – ranching



**P:** the idea that the impact of horses in the area is big is wrong – only a handful of horses and users are up there

**S:** reiterates safety message; Cascade Power Plant underpass is the only safe access because it's the only one that goes under the railroad; should be considered

**G:** you should come and take a ride with us before you just shut us down

**B:** we already know our “build out”, or the maximum number of horse users, science has to take this fixed limit into account

– the problem is not as huge as it was back in 1997 [refer to the ecological problems perceived at the time]; since then use has changed; we need more science, even though science is not the end-all

**G:** wherever we cross over the tracks, eventually, we will need a smooth crossing –

like road crossings – to avoid horses' feet from getting caught in the tracks

**Discussion of the likelihood of horses' feet getting caught in tracks ensued, including an anecdote of a horse being killed with its foot caught in a junction.**

**B:** this is the town and CPR's responsibility, but CPR doesn't want any liability issues, so we have to be careful or they may just build a fence

**M:** CPR has complied with request to blow whistles twice on the blind corner

**H:** there are more horses in the Calgary area than in the rest of Canada.

**Group ends at 9:42 p.m.**

**Recreational Use of the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff  
Summary of Discussions**

**Focus Group #5: Residents at Large – Mountain Bikers, etc.**

6:00-7:30 p.m., Wednesday, October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001 Boardroom, Banff YWCA, Banff, AB  
Seven Participants

Moderator: Carole Stark

Scribe: Melissa Mauro

Introductory discussion about focus groups and the planning process (and timelines) for the Lands Adjacent study.

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**Lets go around the table and tell everybody a bit about your use of the trails in this area**

**E:** likes fire road rides, not an “extreme rider”; “I just like being out there, but nothing too heavy duty.”

**H:** born and raised in Banff; former warden who cut or upgraded many of the trails in the study area; used to be a “radical” rider but remarked that what he rode then probably looks pretty tame compared to what people ride today; ridden every trail in study area at least a couple of times

**M1:** mountain bikes, hikes, runs, and skis (Cascade Fire road and Spray Loop) on trails in the area; concerned about “what’s opened and what’s closed” and about animals, cougars and wolves, etc.

**G:** has wife and 2 young children; runs, bikes, walks/hikes and does some rollerblading on trails in the area, but feels there is a lack of trails in the area to rollerblade on; not a “hardcore” biker – likes to bike with kids in chariot and enjoys taking them “on an explore”; family walks/hikes evenings and afternoons

**M2:** has two small children; bikes and walks/hikes on trails in study area; when alone enjoys “lots of hardcore rides”; also rides with regular weekly riding group which uses trails in Tunnel Mountain area, 2-Jack and Johnston areas; does a “little hike” with her kids everyday, often walking out from house and onto the trails; frequently uses trails in Sundance area, Fenland or Cory, sometimes Stoney Squaw: tries to get kids out on more advanced trails sometimes; ability to easily access trails is why she and

her family lives here, it's "a really important part of our lifestyle. It's a choice."

**D:** resident of Banff for 17 years; Parks Canada employee; mountain bikes or runs on trails every day in the summer; uses Tunnel, airfield and 2-Jack / Johnson areas most frequently; rides for social and fitness reasons; rides with a regular group of guys; "it's my lifestyle, that's why-- the reason -- I live here"

**Y:** 21 years old and born and raised in Banff; "I primarily pedal up to go down hill"; used to ride at Norquay, but didn't then and doesn't now shuttle; enjoys the thrill of biking

**Moderator probe: what makes a great ride for you?**

**D:** scenery and wildlife

**Y:** escape from town and traffic, especially in summer

**M2:** there isn't enough challenging terrain around the town both due to the landscape itself and "the bureaucracy": the trails that were challenging have been closed except for Stoney Squaw

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**This is a bit of a reaction question. You've got cards and a marker in front of you. Take half a minute and write down your first thoughts or feelings around a phrase that I'm going to tell you. The phrase is "trail management."**

**Y:** responsibility

– who is responsible for what on the trail and who's going to fix it?; defining who's going to manage trails and what responsibility users have

**D:** closure

- my perception is with Parks Canada being the manager, usually results in a closure

**M2:** lack of public involvement; lack of volunteer trail maintenance; closures without consultation

- lack of public involvement regarding trail maintenance (as an important part of management); also re: what trails are open or closed and when they're closed
- "there's always closures without consultation, you always feel like you've been shafted"; understands public safety concerns when there's wildlife in the area, but "I really have a problem when no one ever gives us the science behind it."

**G:** closure or restricted use; not paved; use discouraged

- trail management is just "a gentle way of saying that the trail is not going to be paved, it's not going to be up kept, use is going to be discouraged"

**M:** to **G:** asks for clarification, do you mean upkeep on the main trails? Thinks that Parks Canada is cutting back on trail work now, noting that hardly ever sees people doing it. Wonders if it's just wardens doing it now?

**D:** clarifies that there is still a trail crew

**M:** would be nice to have money put into that and to keep the trails that are still open, open; understands that there are reasons to close some trails or limit people in certain areas because of wildlife but should put out more information and "it should be fair with horses and bikes"

**D:** Agrees; Parks does not "come out with the logic"

**M:** suggests issuing permits to bikers and hikers to limit numbers rather than closure; money is needed to maintain the trails we have now

**M:** good (this point was not addressed specifically, discussion was limited to above two points regarding equity for hikers and bikers and putting money into trail maintenance)

**H:** proactivity versus reactivity; interpretive focus

- need to avoid reactive approach of "just close it"; government is obsessed with saving money and so take a reactive approach
- vegetation management needs to be part of proactive management of trails in the area
- have to make everyone aware of and involved in trail management decisions; have to get people out onto the actual trails and explain "every single modification, why it was done"; part of this process should involve developing more trails with a "highly interpretive focus just to get the population aware of the issues"; a proactive response will follow from this

**Moderator:** asks for clarification on "interpretive value"

**H:** have to actively involve people in interacting with the environment by explaining to them what's happening at every step

**E:** fine

- "you folks all sound really emotional and really into this and I'm just going to say... I like the Spray Loop and it's fine"

**Going back and again thinking about your experiences in the study area on trails, and your observations of what you've seen out there, I'd like you to think of three key issues that relate to trail management or use in the study area.**

**Take the three cards in front of you and write them down in just a few words. Going one at a time, put your issues up on the board and explain what you mean by that. If you see similar issues, start to group them together.**

**E:** (1) horses (only has one)

- likes Sundance Canyon trail and takes kids there because knows won't run over horse poop since there's an unpaved part where the horses go; contrast with Spray Loop: horses and bikes on same trail, bikers have to step aside to let horses by; riding through

horse poop on wet side, spraying in your face

- not sure how to address this: tell horse companies or the bikers not to go there anymore? adds that "the bikers are always the ones who get kicked off of all the trails"
- wonders why horses are still allowed in Johnson Lake area but bikes are not, can't understand why bikes make impact but horses don't?
- feels that cyclists appreciate the environment but get kicked off trails while the people on horses are from cities and they "wouldn't think twice about throwing their MacDonald's bag [out]"

**Y:** re: impact → read a study by a prof at Guelph on the differing impact of hikers and mountain bikers', study found no difference on vegetation impact

**Discussion amongst group about the relative impact of different user groups, how use by horses limits use by others, etc.**

**M2:** agrees, but doesn't have a problem in general with horse use because believes people have right/opportunity to this use; does have a problem with commercial operators making money of trails and not being made to pay for trail maintenance

**G:** I'm a horse lover and ride myself, but there's no doubt that horses make trails impassible; need separate horse trails

**Y:** and it's disgusting too: "I don't like riding down a trail and having horse crap flinging up at me from my tires or running through puddles of pee...it takes away from the whole experience"; e.g., Tower 1 is disgusting after horses have been through

**Moderator: quick summary of mixed use, horse manure as "not a great experience", and inequity between user group access**

**D:** interesting around east end of Tunnel close to Cascade river where very few people – few horse club members [i.e. the Light Horse Association] and few bikers; "we all get along very well and the impact is minimal out there"; problems arise in areas with more concentrated use (e.g. Sundance

Canyon / Cave Ave. areas) and impact lessens as you move to areas of less use

**Moderator: let's try to not work so much into the solutions at this point; instead let's try to stick to what the issues are and that way we can capture those**

**H:** (1) vegetation management; (2) interpretive focus; and (3) increased access

- vegetation management: worked as a fire suppression specialist and believes study area is severely fire-threatened; must be very careful about how vegetation is managed but aggressive at the same time: "huge-scale" thinning and new trail construction is needed; also have to keep erosion in mind –applies to all types of trail users; mentions Pine bark issue heating up on Sulphur and suspects there will be closures there in the future
- interpretive focus: Parks' "unilateral declarations" about why they do what they do are a problem; need "sound and clearly communicated reasons" for this; may be inconvenient in short-term, but in the long term "everyone will at least understand why we are the way that we are"; lack of a unified strategy is "what's been sinking this whole operation from the get go"; notes that still talking about the same issues re: trails today as did in early 60's

**E?:** you're not giving us much hope (**laughter**)

- increased access: "as horrible as it sounds, we have to get more people out there participating in this and this [refers to his first and second points] and tying the whole thing together; the more people you have involved with it the better off it's going to be"
- multi-use doesn't work e.g., was involved in original trail development Kananaskis Country: lots of conflict with multi-use and so separated different types of users on different trails to reduce conflict (**M agrees**)

**Moderator: ask M if would like to add anything?**

**M:** agrees with having separate horse trails and issue of money being made by commercial operators and so they should contribute to trail upkeep

- doesn't come into too many problems on trails; would like to know if the wardens tell people when they know cougars are in the area e.g., by trailhead information because "cougars do freak me out now"; **(discussion around the type of information that gets posted)**; information would allow people to make a decision for about whether or not to go on the trail –especially if alone or with children

- H:** trails should be designed with human-animal encounters in mind; has had personal experience with this while working in Kananaskis Country → Steve Herrero was a consultant to design trails safely in bear country e.g., sightlines near water
- interpretive element is also part of this: e.g., could put a sign near buffalo berry bushes explaining what they are and the implications re: bears in area; encourage a positive observation / encounter experience

**G:** (1) lack of connectivity; (2) lack of signage/upkeep; and (3) lack of paved trails: multi-use trails

- lack of connectivity: there are a number of front-country trails around the town, but "we don't really have a trail *system*"; notes that can't get safely from one trail to another with kids; e.g., to bike to Johnson Lake have to go out and across the highway, Spray Loop have to go along Spray Ave and deal with traffic **(someone ? adds that Canmore seems to have a nice trail system along the river)** "the subtle message is 'drive your car to the trailhead'"

**D to G:** is that pertaining to when you have your burley? because we have ways of getting to Johnson Lake where we never touch pavement

- G:** I'm talking more about family activity; young kids (or if pulling a burley) can't handle rough trails;
- a good quality front-country trail system is very consistent with preservation of the park: e.g., it would encourage tourists to go to Johnson Lake by bike rather than car
  - lack of signage and upkeep: locals know trails because we live here; but to promote fitness and "nature-friendly" activity, need better signage telling distances etc.

**D:** but some of the onus is on you as a user; taking some responsibility on yourself to know...

**Y:** but to go for a ride around town you shouldn't have to read it in a guide book – there should be signs

### **M and G agree**

**Moderator: the focus is on trails outside of town, but the point you're making is about connecting them all?**

**G:** yes, even at the Fenland Loop the message is "drive there" because there is no trail that goes there from town

- signage would provide an educational opportunity too

**M2:** K-Country signage is great: map of trails, km marked, see where they link together **(agreement from other participants)**

**G:** "system here is really an embarrassment"; feels it's not consistent with Banff's goal of outdoor bonding with nature

**Some participants discuss K-Country signs, disagreement over whether amount of information is appropriate; some feel it's too much, others like it**

**G:** third point – multi-use trails and lack of paved trails: believes too many trails are for horses only, e.g. the trail behind Middle Springs and Valley View forms perfect front-country loop from Sundance to Spray (following edge of wildlife corridor) would only have to cross one road, or e.g., down to Bow Falls would be good, but trail beside the road is a horse trail, so have to go on the road; only roller-blade trail is Sundance Canyon....."and I have to drive there" **(laughter)**

**M2:** (1) decisions on trails not coming from Ottawa, public involvement in trail management and use; (2) science (peer reviewed); and (3) multi use trails

- decisions: "I'm tired of decisions being made by people who've never even been here, by bureaucrats who've never seen the landscape... have no idea what's going on

and what's happening with us here – people who live here and value what we have here"

- should be public involvement in trail management *and* use: e.g., she was a member of a voluntary trail management group who did maintenance on front-country trails in K-Country; Parks Canada doesn't seem open to this, yet "the more you value the trails the more you want to upkeep them, you want to take ownership, and ownership is a big part of why we go out there, we truly believe those trails are ours"

**G:** gets the feeling that there's no upkeep because Parks doesn't want people to use them (**agreement from others**)

**Moderator: to clarify → you feel that there is a lack of ownership now?**

- M2:** people want to be part of it but it's not promoted or encouraged – husband does work with Parks' trail guy on Stoney Squaw but had to write a contract with Parks to be able to do it; he's the only person she's aware of who does this
- science: feels there is no science "in any of this" and specifically no human use planning or management; some of the science that has been done is not peer reviewed

**Moderator: to clarify → you're talking about social science research or biological?**

- M2:** social science, what you guys are doing right now; but also human use monitoring needs to be done to find out who's out there, where they're from, winter and summer use, etc.; and also animals and wildlife corridors
- third point - multi-use trails do work: never sees hikers on the bike trails on Tunnel Mountain and only the occasional horse, and there is no conflict with them
  - does have conflict with commercial operators: "they're pounding those trails, they should be responsible for them too"

**D:** (1) conflict between horses and bikes; (2) wildlife management; and (3) vegetation management

- wildlife management: when areas are closed due to wildlife concerns "I don't believe in the logic, I don't trust the science"

- vegetation management: he and a group of riding friends take care of trail maintenance "we go hiking every spring and every fall and clear trails" in the Tunnel area; but observes that some people ride around obstructions rather than move them – refers to map of trail system on Tunnel [NOTE: this is the trail mapping done for the LATB project, just completed] and "it's a maze of lines"

**M2 to D:** clarify: you do voluntary trail maintenance without a formal Parks agreement?

**D:** "we don't touch Parks"

**M2:** "...if you did you'd have to write that silly contract"

**Moderator: clarification around the wildlife science → is it that you don't trust or believe the studies themselves, or you don't have the information to know about what they've done?**

**D:** doesn't believe the studies

**Y:** it's always one scientist, some "hardcore environmentalist" coming in and saying this is the way it is

**M2:** Parks isn't looking for alternatives, they're looking for 'this is the line we want to carry'

**D:** agrees; Parks' approach is "the decision has been made, the science backs up the decision"

**Y:** (1) public involvement; (2) ecological impact; and (3) closures

- public involvement: everything that M2 said plus → why not have organized trail days for volunteers to do maintenance as they do in places like Whistler, Vancouver or Golden
- closures: feels there is "a gross lack of public input" into the closures and questions how decisions are made: "I have a vision of some shady guys in a backroom just saying we don't want people biking here anymore because we don't like bikers"

**Moderator: any other responses or things to fill out from this last discussion?**

**D:** economics is important factor: e.g., multiple trail systems for each type of use would cost big bucks

**Y:** another economic factor: golf courses are being built in Canmore while hiking/biking trails are being closed "because we don't have money to lobby the government to get trails opened"

**M2:** notes that closing trails in Canmore just leads to displacement into Banff

**Y:** agrees: mountain bikers were shut out of Banff and so went to Canmore, and now shut out of Canmore; so "where do we go now?"

**G:** feels that saying there is no money for trails is a cop-out; Parks would find a way if the will was there – especially since people are so passionate about the trails (**M2 agrees**); if people were let into the process could make it work: "I'm sure I could even raise private sector money"

**Y:** I had no say in construction of golf courses in Canmore but once they're made, "somebody bitches about wildlife corridors and how the wildlife's been shut out, so somebody's got to lose there"

**E:** feels decisions are economically driven: golf courses bring in money but a bike trail doesn't...e.g., Warner's → clients are coming into town and bringing money as compared to residents who are already here

**G:** a trail system can be a "very value-added factor"

**E:** issue of who pays and who makes money: golf courses are private enterprise, whereas Parks would have to pay for trail system

**Discussion re: economic impacts of different types of trail use and possible approaches to finding money for trails**

**Issues as grouped by participants**

- decisions not coming from Ottawa
- public involvement
- interpretive focus

- wildlife management
- science (peer reviewed)
- horses
- conflicting use management (horses vs. bikers)
- multi-use trails
- vegetation management (erosion)
- vegetation management (erosion, braiding)
- ecological impact
- closures
- increased access
- separate trails for different users
- lack of connectivity
- personal safety re: wildlife (information needs to get out)
- lack of signage and up-keep
- lack of paved trails (family rides, roller blade)

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**Now I'd like you to try to think of examples of trails or scenic roads that work well, that are well managed.**

**(laughter)**

**E:** Spray Loop: other than horse issues, it's well-maintained, easy enough to ride (no big potholes --wonders if this is because someone fixes them?) and wide which facilitates multi-use

**Group discusses possible reasons why it's better-maintained, is it because horses use it?**

**M2:** notes that it's hard surfaced (like Sundance) so there is less impact on it less maintenance is needed; notes that lots of trails in the USA are hard surfaced because of high levels of use

**E:** WaterTower trail is fine, a "little rooty" but all right; again wonders if someone's actively maintaining it

**M2:** Sulphur Mountain front side is good (**nods, agreement**): you get "a little bit of everything"

and a free ride down"; i.e., good workout going up and "it's short, sweet and you get lots of views"

**G:** City of Calgary has a good trail system: never need to be in a car, they put out good maps; Whistler has good system –never need to be in car there either

**Moderator probe: what is a well-managed trail?**

**G:** good signage, information, well-maintained

**D:** prerequisite is "how long do we have?"; chooses trail based on this; adds that he and friends "don't ride down anything we can't ride up"

**M to D:** points out that trails D rides don't have many people on them and that Parks is not going to maintain them "just for you "

**D:** acknowledges this point and reiterates fact that doesn't want lots of people on those trails; e.g., he helped Doug Eascott write his mountain biking guide book and the only trails that they included from the town area were Spray, Sundance and the Water Tower: "we weren't going to tell anybody about where we go because we don't want people going up there because we're getting, we're greedy"

**Y:** Parks will shut it down if more people go there

**D:** true, but also factor of he and author being in awkward positions because they work for Parks; so only trails in the book are the ones that "you'll get told from the rental shops"

**E:** likes the sign on the 1A telling drivers that cyclists use the road; notes that it's the only road that has this e.g., there's no sign on Minnewanka and also no paved shoulder

**M:** runs along the trail paralleling Tunnel Mountain Road near the campground and notes campers using it frequently; when the trail is not in good shape or in winter has to use the road --but road is narrow so people have to use the ditch if a car goes by **(others agree and note other places like this in town)**

**Y:** experiences the same problem going up to the Rimrock; buses are very close, diesel in your face, etc. **(nods, agreement)**

**Group discusses issue of lack of trails that connect well to out of town trails**

**D:** used to work at the Upper Hot Springs and wanted a trail parallel to the road going up the hotpools; **(more nods)**

**G:** would like to see such a trail paved so that "every mountain biker could go up there, not just the hardcore"; reiterates that this is why Calgary system is good "because you don't have to compete with cars"

**Y:** true, but notes that there are big conflicts between different types of users on the Calgary trails; has heard stories about bikers getting beaten up because people perceive them riding too fast

**Group discusses speed and user conflicts on Calgary trails**

**Moderator probe: building on what you've been talking about, thinking about your favourite trails and why they're your favourites, is it due to good management, aesthetics of it, what kind of mix?**

**H:** if we understand the difference between proactive and reactive trail management, then "I don't think there are any well-managed trails around Banff"; "there hasn't been any management"

**M2:** if they find a reason they'll close it

**H:** absolutely; there isn't a well-managed trail

**D:** question: why do we want to manage it? "my perception right now, for what I do, everything's fine"; "I don't have any issues"

**M:** because they haven't closed your trails down yet

**D:** you'll never find me

**Moderator to D: you've found your own trails...and you're actually maintaining them...so it's more of a self-managed situation?**



the highway to get to Johnson Lake, for example, provides neither

**D:** "yes"; but realizes that as time goes on and trails get busier, this may change

**Y:** feels that mountain bikers are "sort of like skateboarders were in the 1980s, like we're social outcasts in this town"

**M2:** sees this as largely the fault of some of the downhill riders who aren't responsible and trash the trails

**Y:** agrees and adds that he's never shuttled up Norquay, always pedals up the road, and that everyone he rides with is very responsible; "I feel really alienated ...because a handful of irresponsible people ruins it for everyone"

**M2:** "someone needs to strong-arm them or educate them"

**M:** asks if wardens are still enforcing at Norquay

#### **Group discusses who is and isn't enforcing at Norquay and in the park in general**

**D:** if Parks would have been proactive and stopped the shuttling, there would have been no problem at Norquay

**Y:** exactly; "if Parks had said to the mountain bikers it's all right if you ride up here and you're responsible, but we don't like it if you do twenty runs a day out the back of your truck and you're bombing up and down the road"

**D:** Parks figured out the "shuttling thing" too late; notes that when he first rode up there, was only 'the Screamer' (**Y adds plus Stoney Squaw or the ski-out**); now it's "like a six-lane highway" and rutted out

#### **Moderator: clarify shuttling → it has allowed people to get up there easily and so increased the number of runs?**

Group: yes; use has increased and resulting erosion was why trails were closed

**G:** getting back to what's a good trail: rides to get away and to enjoy and having to ride on

**M2:** wants her kids to go out and enjoy too, so she screens the trails to use with them; goes to Edith pass with them in jogger

- chooses different areas according to the weather or trail conditions since using trails that are wet/muddy damages them, plus dealing with "a lot of slop": e.g., Edith is good its raining or wet, Tunnel is good when it's dry

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#### **If you had one minute to talk with senior managers at Parks Canada (laughter) on the topic of trail management, what would you say?**

**E:** I would ask "have you ever been on that trail?" because most of them are in offices and other places than here, do they even know what they're talking about? e.g., will "never forget" quote by Sheila Cops showing that she thought 1A was nothing but hotels and gas stations; should be local people making decisions, not people in Ottawa

**H:** "I've spent most of my adult life arguing with senior Parks managers, I have nothing to say to any of them" (**laughter and joking**)

**G:** wants to find out if managers agree that "a quality front-country trail system is consistent with Parks' policy of preservation and, if so, why are they not producing a quality front-country trail system that would encourage people to use trails?"

**M2 and D:** but this is not Parks' mandate now, now it's ecological integrity

**Y:** "Is there any method to their mayhem or do they just sit around the office and point at different areas and say we're going to close this and this and this and this?"; wants to know the logic behind the closures → "tell me exactly why and provide the science to back it up"; wants multiple studies conducted independently of Parks because "I can find a scientist that will tell you the world's flat if he really wants to"

**D:** mandate is ecological integrity, but people are an integral part of that: "People have to be one of the major factors in the equation" **(M2 agrees)**

- being able to use the trails is why we live here; recognizes the need for management because of numbers of trail users and that management can get complicated and challenging, but if Parks "thought more broad there are systems to be able to incorporate [creative or different ways to manage numbers]" e.g., quota systems, various users at various times
- relates experience with Upper Spray closure: D and friends applied for a permit to ride in the area, were willing to take a guide in with them "if that was what it took", but Chief Park Warden denied the request saying that Warner has a limited number of trips he's allowed and that's it for use there, "end of subject"; so D feels that bottom line is that it's unfair: "you can come up with all the logic, but a horse can go and a bike can't"

**M2:** I have an example of good trail maintenance: Moraine Lake highline trail, primarily because people got involved, Ben Marriot (Bow Valley Mountain Bike Alliance member) worked with scientists Steve and Jake Herrero

**Scribe:** can you tell me a bit more about why you think it's good?

- M2:** because when it is animals' (grizzly for instance) feeding area, doesn't want to disturb them (has had past encounters and doesn't want to repeat this); so solution of less human impact at that particular time [referring to berry season] is perfect, we all get to use it at other times; says it's an example of the "use of science to control the trails and that's a beautiful way of dealing [with it] and it's working perfectly up there....so far it is anyway"; could do the same thing here too
- re: talking to park managers: wants to know what their agenda is, information on their backgrounds (e.g., practical, hands-on experience, where trained, how much they use trails personally) and who is making decisions because "right now I have a really negative sense of what's going on in the Kremlin there...it's a closed door policy":

sits on a board with Parks and dealing with the parks people on the board is "brutal" because they're not allowed to share information

- E:** does Parks even know who/how many people are using the trails? e.g. Assiniboine had voluntary sign-in for bikers at trailheads the last year before closed it to bikers;
- she doesn't run into anyone on her rides, so questions how many people are actually out there; 90% of tourists don't stray far from bus or hotel, so maybe Parks thinks there's nobody out there and so doesn't put much effort into trails management
- M:** I've noticed many Japanese tourists on bikes in town; why are they there and not out on trails? because there's no trail system or?
- E:** they're used to riding through hundreds of people

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**Moderator briefly summarizes discussion; did I miss anything?**

**D:** observes from his experience as Parks Canada employee for 21 years, that the organization is slowly changing for the better –internal perceptions improving and the organization is becoming more transparent; notes there are "definitely some personalities involved" and still a bit of an old boys club, but as they retire and next generation comes into senior ranks, situation is improving

**E to D:** so these new people will make it better?

**D:** yes; internally it's better and it's becoming more transparent

**E:** you're saying it's all personal

**D:** thinks personalities play a huge role: people who have been in the system a long time have lots of power and the ability to make a major impact, "that's the nature of an organization, when you get as big as we are, that's the way it is"

**E:** do you think trails will be re-opened?

**D:** thinks that the process of “dealing with them” will be managed more holistically, sees it happening already → “we’re becoming more progressive and not so reactive...and more flexible in our outlook and how we deal with things”; realizes that this is probably not perceived outside of the organization

**M to Scribe and Moderator:** is this going to Parks?

**Scribe:** focus groups form part of thesis; a report will be prepared for Parks that will be used in combination with other information to identify issues and priorities. Next step - ‘so what do we do about it, and how is everyone going to do that together?’

**D:** feels he “can’t get a straight answer on what this study [i.e., the LATB study] is intending to do”

**Scribe:** issue identification

**D and M2 discuss lack of human use research and decisions “made from above”**

**D:** I don’t trust the process; I trust *this* process but when you take this out of this room...

**Indiscernible comments/discussion**

**G:** it just becomes ammunition

**Y:** virtually no trail user in this town is happy with what’s going on because there are no trails and there’s nothing available; agrees with H: must be proactive; “it’s nice that they’re doing something but is it actually going to make a difference at this point?”

**D:** and are the decisions already made?

**E:** hasn’t seen anyone counting users on any bike trails; has seen survey interviewers on Mountain Ave. “every single day asking people ‘how do you like going to the hot springs’....” but never see them on trails; wonders why surveying people in cars if the study is about trail use

**Scribe clarifies:** Parks is five months into 2 years of research and monitoring, next year there will be a more concentrated effort on trail monitoring

**?:** what about the trails that were closed that everybody wants re-opened?

**D:** for example, the east-end of Johnson Lake

**M2:** questions the rationale behind current management in Johnson/2-Jack area: “they built a wildlife corridor through Johnson Lake corridor, and you’ve got Johnson Lake and people can’t even...you’ve got 2-Jack there so they’re creating a corridor for grizzlies through the campground”

**D:** if Parks is serious about restricting use around Johnson Lake, there should be no road going there

**Y:** same with Norquay: if they want that side of the valley as a wildlife corridor, “why do they have a road with hundreds of buses going up it every single day spewing out diesel?”

**G:** ironic that trail users are the people who are most passionate about long-term preservation of the park, but they are made to feel that ? (**indiscernible, others speaking over G**)

**M2:** should concentrate use in the front-country and recognize that it *is* going to be used, but keep the back-country as pristine as possible “because that’s where the animals are going to be and that’s where they’re going to flourish”

– notes that there is evidence of some good science in the area, e.g. “real, normal wildlife interaction happening around town”; such as the pack of 19 wolves that are “decimating the elk population” around town → “that’s normal”

**M:** it’s normal to have them coming right in town?

**M2:** yes because it’s a natural system, “you’re not creating a natural barrier anymore”

– so this is a good thing but unfortunately Parks doesn’t back it up

**M:** well, they’re going to kill them right away when they start....

**Group ended at 7:31 p.m.**

**Recreational Use of the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff  
Summary of Discussions**

**Focus Group #6: Residents at Large – Mixed**

8:00-9:30 p.m., Wednesday, October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001 Boardroom, Banff YWCA, Banff, AB  
Seven Participants

Moderator: Carole Stark

Scribe: Melissa Mauro

**Introductory discussion about focus groups and the planning process (and timelines) for the Lands Adjacent study.**

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**Lets go around the table and tell everybody a bit about your use of the trails in this area**

**S:** lives near Tunnel and hikes on trails there 3-4 times/week, uses Sulphur frequently and uses “just about all the other trails around”

**Moderator probe: where’s a great hike for you?**

**S:** probably a trail outside of this area because these are all short and so familiar; go elsewhere to do something special, though “of course, everything’s special”

**G:** resident for 10 years, uses trails after work to get rid of stress; takes camera out with him and walks/hikes; has walked “just about every trail that there is”

– a favourite hike: Hoodoos trail toward the highway, through underpass, up towards Minnewanka, over to Fenland and home, 8-9 hours

**R:** been in area 10 years and has used all its trails; uses trails for half-day trips or full-day if accessing climbing routes; uses trails in the area mostly for exercise but also likes to take visitors to show them the area

– important to him that look at big picture of trail usage: lots of people using the trails and different types of use (specifically, bikers), there has to be room for everyone; trails have to be used correctly to avoid “having a hiker and biker on the same trails and everyone getting all mad at each other”

**G2:** long-time Banff resident who hikes a little at Fenland and Tunnel and likes to take grandchildren; loves to golf – likes quiet and solitude while golfing and hates noise of

bikers and rollerbladers because “they’re not quiet bikers anymore down on the golf course”

– favourite hiking area is Minnewanka area trails: usually quiet (except for July and August); notes area around the town is getting busier over the years “we used to have ninety days occupancy now we have twelve months”

**P:** lives in Valley View and enjoys many trails in the area both summer and winter, feels that some hikes are a lot more fun in winter; mainly hiking but some biking; tries to find things to do seasonally because “each time can give me a new discovery” – “makes me realize how little I know” and therefore aspect of self-discovery which is a main reason for going out; enjoys going alone and taking others to help them get that “sense of ‘yoho”

– avoids Tunnel since the handrails were put up, feels they are intrusive

**T:** new resident (1 year); when first arrived mainly used trails around townsite but since spring mostly hikes outside of the area and likes to get up high; still uses trails around town to unwind after work and likes to take relatives/friends who are visiting because these trails are shorter and “you can show a lot more in a lot less time”

– doesn’t like asphalt trails (e.g., Sundance), prefers areas that are “more natural”

**Moderator probe: so is it the natural aspect of trails that attracts you?**

**T:** very much so

**M:** uses trails around townsite very often; often takes her daughter; agrees with P re: “using trails year-round and seeing how they change – that’s a great pleasure of mine”; like to get up high, wild places and also likes

“sense of knowing a trail so intimately that I’m starting to know where groups of flowers grow”;

- appreciates undeveloped trails e.g., behind Valley View, partly because likes quiet and meandering along – it’s a “contemplative, spiritual practice”
- also appreciates trail like Hoodoos: a good family trail because it’s wide, meandering and has minimal elevation gain or loss; can accommodate a wide variety of “ages and stages”

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**You all have cards in front of you. If you could take one of them and I’m going to say a phrase, and I’d like you to write your first thoughts and feelings, your reactions about a phrase. The phrase is “trail management.”**

**M:** thank you Parks Canada and volunteers for making wondrous walks a possibility. Keeping them free of deadfall, etc....Bear in area warning; quotas

- just thankful that there are trails and that they are managed

**T:** protection of flora and fauna and trail itself for future generations to use; trail maintenance/upkeep; look into future use/direction trail use is heading; level of group involvement in stewardship of trails (i.e., local, municipal)

**P:** non-marked and/or marked trails; clearing trees; restoration; temporary closure; interpretation

- managing trails by not marking them is wise management, e.g., Middle Springs creek area, travertine ? on the Cascade river – if these were marked they’d be damaged
- clearing trees not just to make it easy for people to use trails, but also restoration aspect
- interpretation is a core part of management; “how we understand it [trail environment] seems to be very much part of the trip”

**G2:** forced ideas; labour; balanced

- trail management can be good if done in the right way but doesn’t want Parks or anyone

else “telling everybody what to do all the time”; but can understand what Peter is saying re: interpretation being useful

**R:** balance; use for all, compromise for all who use the trail

- balance for users: e.g. Tunnel Mountain – for some it’s their first ‘wilderness experience’; if I personally want to have a natural experience I know a dozen other trails I can disappear on

**Moderator: clarification re: balance is necessarily on a lot of the well-used trails, but on some trails.....(indiscernible)**

**R:** important to look at this on some trails; e.g., Cory Pass trail is very well publicized by Parks but there’s one spot where hikers often miss the trail, Parks should put a sign there for those “first-timers”; I can go elsewhere if looking for trails with no signs

**G:** repair; for safety purposes; cleaning

- repair: from erosion from bikes on roots, etc. e.g., new steps on Hoodoos to make it more accessible for inexperienced people
- signs and warnings: e.g., cougar attack last year, dogs attacked, elk rut; hates “panic-mongering” around these types of events by media when it’s just part of everyday life in Banff and that’s how he takes it
- cleaning: deadbrush and deadfall, but also cigarette butts left by tourists: “If anything, I’d like to see a rule brought in or at least advise people ‘if you pack it in, pack it out’” (**agreement from others re: cigarette butts problem**); also find party refuse people leave behind

**S:** need more of it; control of shortcutting; closures to benefit wildlife; protect natural areas from excessive use

- need more of it: observations similar to G on Tunnel trail –garbage, fires at top, shortcutting and erosion despite signs; rare that goes up Tunnel without pointing out problems of shortcutting to people doing it; thinks perhaps should be more of a presence on trails to try to prevent mis-use
- thinks most people in Banff would approve of wildlife closures, and would hope that closures are done when it’s needed

- liked P’s comment re: interpretation, it is a really important part of management; allows people to see more than “what’s immediately evident”

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**Thinking about your own experiences and observations using the trails in the study area, and write down on the index cards what you think are the three most important issues related to trail use and management.**

**We’ll post them up here and I’ll ask you to present your issues in a brief fashion. If you see some similarity or thematic link with another card, put them in the same area.**

**M:** (1) interpretation; interpreters who share their knowledge and love for the area. Help to bridge the opp. [?] between newcomers and the environment (2) wildlife; and (3) trail mis-use: bikes/horses/shortcutting

- e.g., wishes there was signage at the bottom of Sulphur talking about shortcutting; she talks with people about this on the trail all the time; also related to repairs for shortcutting
- closures to protect sensitive areas or wildlife; as P said, maybe just don’t mark them

**Moderator probe: do you see this as being permanent, temporary, seasonal or a combination?**

- M:** some permanent e.g., plants; but berry crops, for example are seasonal, e.g., 2-Jack campground closures where “people were really...accommodating”
- mis-use: was going to say just mountain bikers, but it’s all kinds of users; maybe there have to be trails specially built to handle bikes?

**T:** (1) misuse; (2) trail improvements / progressive planning; and (3) presence of education/knowledge/light policing

- misuse: what M said plus loud, noisy trail users who don’t respect the quiet, garbage, etc.; this a big reason why goes on longer hikes and summits, less people who behave this way

- has background in trail management planning: always important to look into future use and the direction that you want to steer people in to (not necessarily just how it is already going) i.e., more beneficial for nature or more useful for recreational purposes

**M:** re: last point – agrees: if you advertise a the hike through Parks Canada it should be marked, tell you when you're going to go wrong way

**R:** yes, e.g. Tunnel: how many people have been up Tunnel since that trail was built and why? yes, has been trashed in some spots but considering the amount of use and compared with other places (e.g., Europe) with higher populations, Tunnel has hardly anybody on it and is in "extremely good shape"

- railings: Tunnel is "one of the biggest killers in the whole area" so he's glad to see the railings from a safety perspective for young or inexperienced and notes that we've all done foolish things in the mountains

**Moderator: clarification: so improvements directed at high-use or impact, or dangerous areas are a good thing?**

**R:** yes; and there’s going to be high use areas, we have to acknowledge this and we have to look at the people using these areas and manage them accordingly rather than looking just at our use;

- loves to take up people he meets on trails e.g., story of an inexperienced 67 year old hiker from California going up to Larch Valley that he met on trail and went up with "I took my time and passed on the knowledge and they went down with a completely different aspect of the mountain"; have to realize that some people misuse trails as they do out of ignorance, not maliciousness, and need to take a gentler and more sharing approach rather than coming down hard on people who just don't know any better e.g. with shortcutting or other trail etiquette

**T:** maybe as people who do use trails a lot we need to put ourselves in the shoes of these others who are just excited to be here

- signage: is therefore very important because inexperienced people are here doing major hikes but are unprepared re: clothing, footwear, knowledge; feels that when this type of person is following you up a trail, they sort of become your responsibility; if popular routes are going to be advertised (e.g., Temple) they should be signed

**R:** Tunnel fencing at top: Parks did terrific job because put fence right at edge to give people the view and still keep them safe; first time he's ever seen that happen in the Park

**P:** feels that having less signage and encouraging more self-reliance would "impart greater respect for freedom, our own sense of freedom and for freedom that's a larger concept that we aspire too"; for these values, strongly dislikes and would oppose seeing a sign, e.g. at backside of Cory or the railing on Tunnel

**S:** notes that of the 3 deaths on Tunnel in the past 8 years, none would have been prevented by the railings because they weren't a question of people slipping on the trail, but rather of people without sufficient knowledge; "those railings were put up in a symbolic way to pretend that they were doing something about deaths that had nothing to do with ? [lack of safety infrastructure?]"

**T:** third issue –education /knowledge: important to help steer people in the right direction (literally) and where behaviour is concerned; not necessarily signs, but people to monitor trails, perhaps wardens' job?; people have so many questions, would be great to have someone there they could ask

**P:** (1) privilege not right (and attendant responsibility); (2) hide some places; and (3) environmental knowledge and sanctions (learn, adapt, hold government accountable)

- presence here is a privilege that comes with set of responsibilities which applies to many aspects of trail use
- hide some places (**some laughter and joking, some looks of disagreement or confusion**); remarks that lots of the trails he likes to go on aren't on the maps (specifically w.r.t. the Resident Survey and

its map: scale of map does not allow for showing where he goes, e.g., 2 year old daughter's favourite trail)

- problem: trail use is an activity and activities are not legally challengeable in national parks regulatory structure: neither under National Parks Act nor Environmental Assessment Act; sees this as a failure of governing system because citizens have no recourse to control government when it, other citizens or interest groups do the wrong thing; story: "discovery" of eagle migration in 1991 that has in fact been happening for millennia → so lots of things out there we don't know, and therefore believes that for people to say that "human interest is paramount" is not right; Given we don't know enough, how do we learn, adapt, and change our ways (if its necessary to do so) in the face of disputes? should be by citizen sanction, but no avenue of recourse exists for issue of trail mis-use

**T:** agrees with privilege not right; people are losing respect for the wildness of trails – 100 years ago people who came had to be prepared because they *knew* it was wild, it's still wild but forget because of constant human presence

**R:** disagrees with notion of hiding some places: what gives one person the right to have one special place that don't tell anyone else about? strongly believes everybody has the right to share everything in a national park; "if I find a treasure I'm not going to run out and tell everyone, but I'm not going to hide it either"

**P:** rights suggests an entitlement, that something belongs to people whereas privilege suggests that something exists in its own right – not because it belongs to us (**missed next comment**)

**G2 to P:** but who implements that?

**P:** it's easy to implement rights and we do that legally all the time

**G2:** but that makes it a little bit tough for trail management...bit dictatorial

**P:** disagrees with that connotation; but agrees that implementing sense of privilege is a

deeper challenge in our society because we are accustomed to "almost cancer-like encroachment of rights on things that go across all parts of society"; feels that for rights to be more powerful in society, they need to be more circumscribed: rights are diluted when we say that we have rights to everything: "I think that there's some things that we shouldn't have rights to and, in some respect, going onto a trail and exploring it on its own terms is a way of saying that it's not my right to be there, but I'm fortunate and I take great pleasure in the privilege I have to be here."

**G2 to P:** are you saying if a tourist comes to town they should have to get approval from somebody? I just don't know [how this would happen or be implemented]

### Disagreement from some participants who are discussing this as P speaks

**G:** (1) information should be available for use of trails; (2) so interpretation services should be available; (3) hikers/some bikers don't work on some trails; and (4) abuse not acceptable

- should be a central point for information on trails
- hikers and bikers don't work on same trails: some bikers are considerate but others aren't and in those cases, "you have to get off the path, I know that for sure. That's just the way it is" (**R: agrees separate trails needed and notes that some hikers are also not considerate**)
- cigarettes and garbage just not acceptable, "they should be fined or something, but you're not asking me for solutions so..."

**P:** agrees with **G** that amount of litter is annoying, especially where private commercial operators are not taking caring of the spillover from their operations, e.g., rafting from Bow Falls: operator not taking care of garbage at either end

- government should do its job and keep track of its licensed operators but again, there's no legal sanction on activities

**M:** also goes for horse riding

**R:** never understood how it is that bikers aren't allowed in some areas due to trail damage but horses are; remarks that because they're "part of the heritage of the park they're allowed to dig up ditches this big"; both should be able to use it, just have to find a solution

**R:** (1) balance; (2) presence: official or unofficial; and (3) education

- unofficial presence: my presence → I've decided to live here, I have a duty to take care of it e.g., if hike takes longer because talking with others to pass on education, so be it
- residents are very educated because we live here, but 5.5 million visitors here and "I'm glad they come here, if they weren't here I wouldn't be here, and I have my gratitude towards them and to be able to share it with education and to be able to see the look on their faces for that one hike because they're from Berlin, or they're from Milan, or they're from Tokyo, and they never even thought that this was possible"
- if we need fire pits at top of Tunnel to control it, or to hire someone to pick up garbage, let's do it; we can always go elsewhere

**P to R:** what do you mean re: official and unofficial presence?

- R:** makes crack about wardens not able to enforce anymore so maybe should be on trails educating people
- official presence: e.g. park warden should be going up and down Tunnel talking with people
  - unofficial: people like you and me, who do say "it's a privilege and not a right and we do have to put back what we get out of it"

**G:** (1) responsibility; (2) courtesy; and (3) awareness

- responsibility: pack it in, pack it out; letting people know where you're going and when you'll be back, etc.
- courtesy: between users e.g., bikers going too fast on Alymer who don't really care that you have a heavy pack and can't move quickly; "at least with a bear you can back off, with a bike he's just on top of you all of



sudden"; feels things have changed since he first came into town, now people are antagonistic most of the time

**G2:** "hate to say it but" thinks lot of those people are employees of the park [i.e., park and its businesses as opposed to tourists] because "you don't get a fifty year old that's coming from Germany that's going to give you a lot of trouble"; staff should be informed about the usage of the Parks and the trails

**G:** awareness – when first came here was height of rut, had never heard of it and got chased by elk so dove under warden truck nearby (**laughter**); no real education, if you go around you can find pamphlets but have to do so much reading...asks where this is being taught, especially to newcomers

**G2:** "I think that's the secret, I think they have to be informed"

**G:** e.g. at the hotel he works at, had 6 staff die over two-year period climbing Cascade Falls; the next year they [who?] did education at the hotel but they were the only one in town

**Moderator: clarify re: trails – awareness of what's there, safety?**

**G:** just hazards in general, this is a National Park, we don't want to put the animals in cages; e.g., thunder and lightning and what to do, little simple things like that

**G2:** story: golfing with three women last year and heard three young boys on nearby mountain calling for help; boys were in running shoes, got stuck; expensive heli-rescue; feels that if they'd been informed they wouldn't have gone up there

**T:** works as staff accommodation supervisor and tries to educate staff when she sees them heading out unprepared: says they just don't realize these things; thinks the Best of Banff Heritage Training is great for educating staff, resort has a program every three or four months

**S:** (1) presence; (2) wildlife protection; and (3) urban intrusion

- Tunnel really is deteriorating: broadening, erosion, and almost never see any presence except for locals
- wouldn't like to see many more signs "telling everybody everything that could go wrong everywhere", yet in well/over/mis-used areas should be greater warden presence helping to educate people to treat the place with more respect; sees this as restatement of P's comments re: privilege
- preservation for future generations: annoys her sometimes because national parks also try to preserve place for "present generations that aren't human" e.g., wolves, cougars trying to get around the town; should all feel sense of privilege and not wanting to make negative impact
- wildlife protection: trails ought to be managed for this e.g., wolf denning, berry season, calving closures are all good
- urban intrusion: putting up signs doesn't necessarily work and is sometimes symbolic in same way that railing on Tunnel is; "things go wrong in the mountains and I'm not sure how you can 100% address that...things go wrong even when people live in the town and putting up a railing isn't effective and it does intrude and give another sense; like we could pave that whole area, we could put up rails, we could have a gondola going to the top of Tunnel, we could turn it into Disneyland but this is a National Park and I don't think any of that is appropriate"; "trying to turn it into a safe urban place with all of the little things that you would expect in the city is the wrong way of going about it"

**Issues as grouped by participants**

- hide some places
- urban intrusion
- balance
- environmental knowledge and sanctions
- trail improvements/progressive planning
- privilege not a right
- wildlife; plants too
- wildlife protection
- awareness
- education
- presence: official or unofficial

- courtesy
  - interpretation
  - presence of education/knowledge/light policing
  - trail mis-use: bikes/horses/shortcutting
  - responsibility
  - trail mis-use
  - mis-use
  - information
  - interpretation
  - hikers/some bikers don't work on same trails
  - abuse not acceptable
- (the last four issues were all written on one card and the card was placed within this group)**

**Moderator: what do you think are some good examples of trail management? Can you pinpoint some specific either scenic roads or trails that you think have been well-managed?**

**M:** Lake O'Hara trails but they're not here

**S:** closure of the Spray Valley trails for wolf denning

**P:** re: Lake O'Hara trail map → likes the scale of the maps (1:2000 or 1:5000) because destinations only half-hour or hour away are clearly marked and this encourages people to follow trail and discover what's there; most park topo maps are much larger scale

- also thinks trail maintenance 'society' at O'Hara that supplements park work is good and notes that they are supportive of Parks' broader ecological goals as well

**M:** those trails are so beautifully built and so obviously built, that helps limit shortcutting that results from not knowing where trail is or where you're supposed to go; remarks on educational photos there that show how trails have looked over time; "those people love the trails"

**R:** who funds the trails at Lake O'Hara?

**M:** the people who use them and also the commercial operators

**R:** so there is a direct fund from the commercial operator, it's a very exclusive resort

**M:** no, there are three sources, it's not just commercial – it's commercial, the alpine club and the people who take the bus up

**R:** but what funding do you have in this [i.e., LATB] area?

**M:** you could have the Parks and the people using this area

**R:** I haven't seen a lot of work done on Tunnel mountain trail to manage it

**Moderator probe: this direction is good. Thinking more generally of what is good management, what does a well-managed trail look like to you?**

**R:** trails at O'Hara with stone laid out through scree take time, effort, manpower, funds and it's great, but feels that it's just like a rundlestone path going up to somebody's house: "what's the difference between that and a fence being put up on Tunnel mountain?", in my personal viewpoint there's no difference

- key problem in the area is lots of young people and "I don't know about you guys but when I was 19, 20 and 21 I was invincible to the world, no harm was ever going to come" – how do you educate those people who don't want to be educated?

**T:** with that age group, it's gaining their respect

**P:** beginning of Vermilion Lakes road is well-managed as a mixed vehicle, bike and pedestrian trail; **(nods of agreement)** believes reason is regular presence of Parks Canada leading interpretive walks and notes that there also used be walks on Tunnel and elsewhere but these were cut with interpretation cuts

**G:** Cascade Ponds: fire pits and shelters there so wardens are always there, just like Bankhead; whole Minnewanka route is well-patrolled [presence is good]

**P:** there's a few trails that are well-managed because humans are not there, e.g., Sulphur wildlife corridor, Fairholme range

**R:** but those ranges like the Fairholme range, how many people go there? Is that one of your hidden, special places – it's not like Tunnel mountain

**P:** other areas are well-managed because there is room for people of all ages and abilities e.g., grateful for paving to provide for wheelchair past Cave and Basin, origin of the national parks –though personally it isn't his favourite type of trail; feels there doesn't need to be many of these types of trails in order for the area to be well-managed, just have to ensure that there is some provision of this type of trail

**S:** doesn't understand reason for voluntary closures; feels sends a mixed message and fears that responsible don't go but irresponsible people do; would prefer that if there's a reason to close something, then close it

**R:** agrees, but in a democratic state sometimes that's just how it has to be

**R to M:** does like O'Hara type trails and thinks should be done more often, e.g. on backside of Sentinel into Paradise often thinks should be more established trail because very difficult to get through the rocks

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**If you had one minute to speak with senior managers at Parks Canada about this topic of trail management, what is the one key point that you would like to get across?**

**G2:** information – people must be informed

**P:** concept of balance that is not static but proceeds over time is important: illustrates with story: must be balance between humans and nature, and for there to be balance must be give and take, and for decades we've been taking and taking and taking and now it's time to give back

**T:** needs to be stewardship by all users of trails and also for the areas through which trails travel, bigger picture view of human-, wild- and plant-life

**M:** thinks that the first thing managers would say is that there's no money for interpretation or maintenance, who's going

to pay for this?; but thinks "trail management is a worthy pursuit; it's lofty enough that maybe we should find ways to get the money"

– trails help feed our bodies and spirits; trail users are helped to be responsible by information and interpretation

**S:** ecological integrity is the number one focus, this is a national park and that's what comes first; and we'll be happy to mold our activities around that, "we'll find things to do that are responsible – but help us do that"

**G:** should be instructing people when they first arrive, maybe brochure at gate or channel on t.v. that everyone has to go on e.g., why are trails being closed?

**R:** lots of information out there but need to look at the problem and not the symptom; what is the true problem? e.g. Tunnel: part of problem is lots of people, people's behaviour, what 's the solution?

**T:** specific to each trail?

**R:** yes...it does come down to dollars and cents doesn't it? It would be great to have trails like at Lake O'Hara [but where would the money come from]?

**G2:** agrees, thinks that user pay system will eventually have to come, "somebody had to pay for it"

**M:** re: well-managed trails → Fenland Trail (**agreement from others**); built trail is appropriate for level of use it receives, not a lot of signage, good for people of all varieties and ages, most mountain bikers don't like it because it's not "thrilling enough" (**laughter, agreement**)

**Moderator summarizes and asks if anything we haven't touched on and should add?**

**S:** enforcement hasn't really come up and it's part of what she means by 'presence'; "education is all well and good but sometimes it's just a question of enforcement"

**Comments and some agreement from group around problem of lack of wardens enforcing this summer**

**P:** I would have enjoyed hearing other people's thoughts on what some of the problems are

**Moderator and scribe probe: clarification re: distinction between problems and issues?**

**P:** issue could be a synonym for topic, doesn't have to be associated with a problem; he didn't assume that 'issue' was just about grievance-oriented problems

- one problem is Parks Canada's acceptance of the trade-off of reduced public use in exchange for increased private use, e.g., Parks' encouragement of Town expansion into Middle Springs, thereby closing trails to the public in an area that is the origin of the national park system itself; feels that it didn't have to happen this way; sees similar pattern in policy discussions dealing with problems of increased commercial presence – policy response is to curtail public access; sees this as a major philosophical problem
- would like to see "foraging areas": type of interpretive trail where guides could take people and they can taste stuff, etc. connect with environment; using environmental education to increase love of the area and give people a more intimate attachment, experience

**S:** has been a failure to foresee and curtail the growth of the town and this has led to now needing to restrict the use of trails

**T:** growth of commercial enterprise and also of the town itself (people) continues to feed increasing tourism

**G2:** but everybody wants to be here

**R:** and everybody has a right to be here

**S:** situation now is that any reduction in tourism is seen as a problem, but "it's not right to keep on growing in a national park" as if there were no limits

**Moderator: and these are all factors that are part of the root problem of trail management issues?**

**S:** yes.

**Discussion ended at 9:35 p.m.**

**M:** that would satisfy people's curiosity to get out and experience park and maybe keep them off of other more risky trails

**Recreational Use of the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff  
Summary of Discussions**

**Focus Group #7: Residents at Large – On foot, Group 1**

6:00-7:30 p.m., Thursday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 Boardroom, Banff YWCA, Banff, AB

Nine Participants

Moderator: Carole Stark

Scribe: Melissa Mauro

Introductory discussion about focus groups and the planning process (and timelines) for the Lands Adjacent study.

birdwatching; for hard exercise usually goes further from townsite area

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**Lets go around the table and tell everybody a bit about your use of the trails in this area.**

**D:** resident for several years; uses trails in study area mostly for running but also some biking and hiking; does more biking and hiking outside of the study area

**K:** resident for one and a half years and is still discovering trails in the area; hikes, runs and bikes on trails; uses Tunnel most, usually backside; likes smaller, out-of-the-way trails because don't see anyone on them; also uses Healy creek, Minnewanka and Spray a bit

**M:** resident for 26 years; most of hiking is done outside of the study area, but also uses trails inside quite frequently e.g., uses Tunnel mountain the most (Up to five time/week) because right out back door; enjoys communing with nature and not being surrounded by tons of people so often uses lesser known parts of Tunnel or around back; enjoys getting out for even an hour or two: "restores, recharges your spiritual batteries, wipes the cobwebs"; using trails is extremely important part of M's family's life and having access to this was one of the reasons for moving here

**M2:** resident for 10 and a half years; self-employed and likes to take a break every afternoon and go out for 1 – 1.5 hour walk; goes up Tunnel 3 or 4 times/ week and I never see you **(to M, laughter and comments about how don't bump into people even though all out there)**; also enjoys Tunnel backside, Sulphur for harder exercise; goes out to do some thinking, be outside in the woods, resolve issues with projects; also bikes, mainly on pavement – Minnewanka, shoulder season at Johnson

**J:** resident for 28 years; for more extensive hikes usually goes outside of study area but in study area uses trails mostly to walk dog; "it's sort of my way of keeping track of the seasons and what's going on in terms of the ice, when the ice breaks up, when the birds come back"; "not major photography or major bird-watching or major anything, it's just kind of keeping track of the seasons and the way they turn here"; a favourite trail: Surprise corner-Hoodoo trail along the Bow

**Moderator probe: what draws you to Tunnel?**

**M2:** it's close to home, uphill so can get a bit of a workout and there's other people around – latter point is important because often goes alone, so good to know that if something happens then people will be there to help

**S:** resident for 12 years; appreciation of trails has evolved over the years; trails used most in study area are Johnson Lake (particularly the access through the beaver ponds) in early and late summer, and trail behind Tunnel (summer) for hiking; goes to get some peace which is why doesn't use Johnson as much in summer; also enjoys

**D2:** resident for 56 years; love of hiking came from school: teachers used to take her and schoolmates out on trails every weekend; goes for 1.5 hours in morning and 1.5 to 2 hours in afternoon; usually down the river to Fenland and out to third Vermilion lake or behind Tunnel, Hoodoo trail, and elsewhere; just to get away and enjoy the scenery

**J2:** resident since 1985; lives in Valley View and so uses area on this side of the bridge more; found comments on Tunnel interesting because would probably use Tunnel or Hoodoos more is she lived on the other side; hikes, runs, bikes and rides

horses; for hiking uses Sulphur trail most: follows horse trails up to Rimrock, likes to go up "as fast and as hard as I can...and it still gives me time to clear my head and to look around", takes gondola down; also likes backside of Sulphur because not many people and has different sun aspect; uses Spray for mountain biking to Goat Creek in summer and for running other times of the year; Johnson too; rides horses mostly from corals but occasionally trailers; enjoys solitude but also likes to talk to visitors encountered on trails

- concerned about abuse of Tunnel and Sulphur e.g. erosion and trail braiding; struggles if should/shouldn't say anything to people who are shortcutting, and with how to say something nicely

- I:** resident for 50 years and uses all the trails; now at a stage where "use it or lose it" so goes out every day; one of favourite hikes is "the long way to the post office": from residence on Deer St. – up Tunnel to Hoodoos – to the river – post office – back home; choice of trails depends on who he's with e.g., takes grandchildren up Stoney Squaw
- feels that all trails in area deserve attention (i.e., maintenance) because they serve so many people; was told that trail crew budget has been severely cut from \$1.4 million to ~\$100 000 and notes that "you can't do much" with that amount; bit sad to see relatively few people using trails while at the same time Banff Ave. is chock-a-block full

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**You each have a pen and some cards in front of you. I'm going to give you a phrase and I'd like you to take about 30 seconds to write down your first reaction, thoughts, feelings to this phrase. The phrase is "trail management."**

**I:** Park should maintain a high level of trail management (**no card collected**)

**J2:** little

- was going to put none: Parks Canada does little trail maintenance

**D2:** some of the trails need improvement, for instance around Johnson lake on the one side

**M:** shortcutting; garbage

- angry that nothing is done about it by Parks Canada: I try to do my bit but it would be each time you're out, kind of destroys your day

**K:** making trails more accessible and less 'wild'; good versus bad

- mixed reaction: can be the best or the worse → worse can make it less wild and attract more people or best can stop erosion and shortcutting

**S:** control of use; trail maintenance, building

- control: who is able to use it and when?
- maintenance and building: as K said, is this good or bad?

**J:** does this mean improvement, maintenance, and by whom?

- improvement: do you want to improve trails? doesn't think so, feels they are already "pretty optimal"; do have to maintain trails because there's so many people coming into the area that you can't educate them all; "by whom?" refers to cooperating associations, Parks, local people

**M:** lack of overall/global planning/vision; diversion; management of opportunity; access versus protection; multiple use

- almost complete lack of overall/global planning, "whatever management is done is ad hoc knee-jerk reactions to immediate problems", nobody is saying let's design an overall strategy for human use in Parks as a whole or the Banff area
- multiple use: sometimes it's compatible sometimes it's not
- erosion/shortcutting: question of education and sometimes trail design, but "do you see any education in terms of trail use?"
- lots of trail work is like engineering work: only going from a to b rather than something that relates to needs of trail users; feels this is one reason why there is a multiplicity of trails: "if somebody wants to go the edge

and look over, they're going to go the edge and look over"; relates approach of some landscape architects working on university campus- developed no trails for one year and watched where people walked – put trails there; may not be appropriate in a national park but should look at why people are doing what they're doing and let that guide the design and management of trails

- displacement: doesn't seem to be recognition of how closing one area diverts people elsewhere and creates a whole new series of problems; "that's not rocket science, but it never seems to be recognized"

**D:** regulation; conservation

- first point is regulation: little bit of a negative tone, but then after comes positive in conservation; points out that consciously chose conservation rather than preservation, "there is a difference" (does not elaborate)

**There are three cards in front of you. I'd like you to take them and on each write one issue about trail management or use that is important to you. You can think broad or very specific, whatever level you want. Also think wide open → could be ecological, social, process, management issue, etc.**

**Tape them up the board and if you see a relationship between the themes of different cards, group them together**

**S:** (1) Trail degradation; (2) ecosystem health compromised; and (3) out of my way

- well established trails have been compromised e.g., Tunnel: shortcutting and braiding and proliferation on backside
- ecosystem health compromised (related to first point): e.g., at Johnson Lake "I find ...myself I'm worried about where I'm going and how I'm traveling just because there's new trails that have been developed in that area that I've helped to create"; notes that in the last few years commercial tour operators have been using these areas and trails have gotten even larger; problem: there is no designated trail and people's natural inclination is to go to areas along the lake – I know this has scared off birds that might

have used these parts of lake; "there's just so many people out there"

- "out of my way": means more than just too many people on trail, an attitude people have...

**M:** gridlock on the trails – hiking rage (laughter)

- S:** agrees and notes that it's not necessarily mountain biker versus hiker (though feels this is the biggest conflict in this area); thinks would be interesting to correlate what people do for a living with reason for going on trails – "so many people around here are fried at the end of the day that they need some grounding and some peace" – leads to attitude of "I want to have this scenic viewpoint to myself"

**J2:** (1) ecological needs balanced with actual human use; (2) erosion on well-used trails; and (3) lack of management/planning

- ecological needs balanced with actual human use: has personal concerns about disrupting natural life, feels it at places like Johnson or on backside of Sulphur – wonders "should I be here, should I not? ...I don't want to be disturbing birds, wolves, whatever if this is ...prime habitat for them
- aggravated by voluntary closures because she doesn't go but others do (including her friends, which creates a personal conflict of choice: friends say "well, if they didn't want us to go there, they would say don't go there"); feels voluntary closures are unfair to those who are "meeker" because "more aggressive people will go wherever they want, whenever they want. But that's being human I guess"
- lack of management/planning: similar to M's points – need to understand where people go and how they use areas, and to recognize that trails are well-used and plan for what to do about it "instead of just moving the odd tree"

**K:** (1) education: what effects we are having, how to prevent impact, how many users; (2) accessibility issues – local versus visitor experience; and (3) erosion and trail widening – Sundance, Healy, Spray

- doesn't feel has the ability / enough information to decide whether or not personal use is having an impact; is

especially concerned about back of Tunnel where bikes a lot on "soft trails that are not well-established"; would really like to get together with other trail users to find out if there are any studies on this, so that could know which areas should and shouldn't be used

- visitors versus residents: these groups have to be dealt with separately where education concerned: recalls that experienced area very differently as a visitor (i.e., before living in Banff) because didn't know about the trails that uses now
- erosion: e.g., Sundance in July was "just a big mud puddle...it was pretty discouraging you're just covered with mud...it wasn't an experience that I'd like to have in the wilderness, it didn't really feel like wilderness to me"; feels that protecting ecological integrity would also help to improve trail experiences

**I:** (1) education related to the trails (environment) (booklets etc); (2) usage – open mind; and (3) long term planning allowing for appropriate budgeting

- education: saw through his experience as a volunteer trail guide that if people had more information (e.g., booklets) they would get more out of trail experience, but this type of material is not really available
- open mind: this is important because don't want to exclude people. e.g., Johnson Lake: is the only big lake in the area so it's natural that people want to go there to swim or take their kids, etc.; in this context, the restrictions in and around the lake are "not helping a heck of a lot"; acknowledges that there are some areas important to wildlife and they may need to be excluded from usage, but "the point is to keep an open mind on that"
- mixed use: e.g. bikes and hikers; has no problem with bikes "as long as they have a certain measure of consideration"; however notes that as far as trail abrasion is concerned, there may be an issue
- longterm planning: important and requires appropriate budgeting so that can take a long term approach

**M:** (1) overall or global trail management strategy: define objectives, define measures of performance e.g., control level of use,

e.g., remove an opportunity – replace with comparable option; (2) management of multiple use – recognition of interaction among conflicting users, recognition of quality versus quantity interaction, education; and (3) recognition of importance of access to residents – unique impact on residents of local access, control intensity of use, education

- need to define objectives for the management process otherwise can't measure how you're doing
- Parks doesn't even have baseline human use information, has to start gathering it now
- Parks has worked on determining appropriate types of activities, but hasn't gone the step further to say that "a use is... not necessarily appropriate at all levels, at all intensities" e.g., need to look at questions of social carrying capacity
- when trail opportunities are removed, they should be replaced with others that are comparable: believes that one reason for resistance to some of Parks' closures / restrictions is that people see the need for protection and conservation but *don't* see any recognition from Parks of the fact that an important recreational opportunity has been lost; this is one aspect of overall plan
- thinks voluntary closures do work when education to encourage understanding and compliance is done well – maybe few people don't comply, but "a few is not the end of the world"; would rather see voluntary restrictions than legislated ones
- multiple use: need to acknowledge that conflict exists between different users and to get to the best way of managing them so that everyone's interests are recognized
- access: many people move to Banff because of access to what Parks offer, so the loss of local access is uniquely important to residents and their quality of life; this is true even compared to someone from Calgary: when you live in Banff and want to walk to where you're going to recreate, there aren't many options if you start to lose access [to these areas]; "the whole idea of living in a small town is I don't have to use my car, I can walk wherever I'm going"



**J:** (1) wildlife/people interaction: public safety, well-being of wildlife, need resources to monitor (i.e., Friends of Banff); (2) habitat degradation: mountain bikes in muddy seasons (downhill), trail braiding, user groups self-policing; and (3) interface of Townsite to National Park: keep it wild, potential for education, get there without driving

- remarks that it's interesting to see how much people at the focus group are in agreement...
- wildlife-people interaction: noticed "loading" of resident survey questions toward this; feels that managing for public safety issues around wildlife is very important –both for people *and* for animals, because if a person gets hurt "it's a death sentence on the animal....the safety of the public is ultimately the safety of the animal"
- to do this have to allocate resources to programs such as elk monitoring and hazing by wardens: this was a proactive move by wardens and Friends of Banff; this type of management "has to happen because wildlife *are* right there...that's the thing I love about it" (illustrates this point by relating that own dog was attacked by a cougar on front steps of home last year but doesn't hate the cougar); feels that while public safety is a concern, doesn't necessarily mean close all trails
- degradation: it's appropriate to ride a bike when it's dry, not when it's wet; distinguishes between downhill and cross-country bike riders, and horses w.r.t. trail damage and notes that the new bikes enable people to ride where they never could before –need to think about what are appropriate levels of use
- trail braiding: need education and need user groups to be voluntarily self-policing to some extent e.g., shops selling mountain bikes can do some education; if don't, will result in complete restrictions [no use] like what happened on Norquay
- interface of townsite and national park: "get there without driving, that to me is what the trails around here are about"

**M2:** (1) short-cutting: lack of education, lack of understanding, carelessness; (2) dogs off-leash out of control, "crap"; and (3) mountain bikers on hiking trail

- sees all three of these as related to lack of understanding which is due to lack of education or to simple carelessness; believes that can't do much about carelessness but fortunately there are not too many people like that

**M:** education can be very effective: has seen an area where Parks educated trail users about trail etiquette over a number of years and it did change people's behaviour; "you'd see people proud of themselves because they're walking through trails up to the top of their boots in mud, but they knew it was good for the environment"; Parks is no longer making this effort in the area and there has been a gradual deterioration in quality of behaviour of trail users

**J:** also need well-defined trails, otherwise people just go off

**M:** yes, and appropriately designed: trails should go where you'd think it would be appropriate, i.e., scenic, meander, etc.

**D2:** (1) education to people for trail use; (2) sharing trails; and (3) looking after trails - trail maintenance

- sharing trails: bikes and hikers and horses

**D:** (1) users i.e., conflict on use groups; (2) erosion from sources i.e., bike tracks versus horse tracks...leading back again to social conflict; (3) regulation of who and when trails may be used

- sees all three issues as 'social conflict'
- regulation: is a need but also presents a conflict because "when you say you can't bike here but you can ride your horse here...there's a bit of a conflict" e.g., as a runner has conflict with horse use on Spray Loop: can't stand smell of horse crap, flies and having to stand and wait for a horse train of twenty riders to pass by: "and I'm running and they're making money on the trail and there's poo on the trail....I can understand you're allowed to have a horse here but maybe put a bag under his bum or something" (laughter) "it's horrible and it ruins your experience"; same issue on Healy Creek – horses use paved part too
- as biker, understands that if you're walking or running and a bike comes up behind it's

not very pleasant; so need to understand conflict and manage users

**M:** and need to do this holistically: e.g., if say that some trails shouldn't be used by horses or bikers, then also designate ones that can be used by bikers or horses - or maybe even only they can use; this way all user groups feel that their needs have at least been recognized (if not satisfied), and are less likely to feel that they've been unfairly treated

**J2:** regarding commercial horse traffic on Spray: this is a recent thing and not knowing where they're allowed to go [is problematic]...

**M:** again, overall program → if knew that commercial traffic could use Spray between set hours each day, you wouldn't go

#### **Issues as grouped by participants**

- accessibility issues: local versus visitor experience
- recognition of importance of access to residents
- looking after trails – trail maintenance
- management of multiple use
- users i.e., conflict on use groups
- regulation of who and when trails may be used
- wildlife/people interaction
- lack of management/planning
- long term planning allowing for appropriate budgeting
- overall or global trail management strategy
- out of my way
- sharing trails
- usage – open mind
- interface of townsite to National Parks Canada
- erosion and trail-widening
- erosion
- erosion on well used trails
- trail degradation
- habitat degradation
- education to people for trail use
- education related to the trails (environment) (booklets etc.)

- education
- shortcutting
- dogs off-leash out of control "crap"
- mountain bikers on hiking trail
- ecological needs balanced with actual human use
- ecosystem health compromised

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**Are there places out there in this study area where you think things are well managed? (laughter) Another way to look at this is, you have favourite trails you go on and for certain reasons – is it partly because it's well-managed?**

**D2:** Fenland trail and Vermilion lakes is well maintained (**nods, agreement**), good access (can go down along the river to Fenland and out to Vermilion) and there's no horses

**D:** and there's little information cards there too

**M:** you're actually walking on a road there too

**J:** it's well defined: it's swampy so you walk on the trail because it's where you want to walk...there's no reason to go anywhere else

**M:** and it's very attractive; thinks Vermilion could be a wonderful trail if it was closed to vehicles

**D2:** disagrees: there's a lot of older people who use that area and like to drive out to the lakes, to close it off would be... (**someone fills in would be a shame, others agree**)

**M:** but could look at how can it be managed to provide for both e.g., regarding older people, we're talking about local residents, so maybe it could be open to locals in vehicles?

**D2:** or only for certain hours etc.

**K:** regarding well managed trails: all depends on what you're looking for; personally likes back of Tunnel because not many visitors know about it yet

**M:** back of Sulphur too, chance of seeing anyone is close to nil, get some exercise

and a ride down the gondola; whereas back of Tunnel you're taking your chances because getting popular with mountain bikers: network of trails up there is the best for a mountain biker who's only got an hour

**What does a "well-managed trail" mean to you? What are your criteria?**

**J2:** 'well managed' is not a word I'd use to describe any trail in this area – doesn't mean don't derive pleasure from them, but never thought 'this is a well-managed trail'

**D:** disagrees: paved part up at Hoodoos for the lookout is well-managed: has interpretive info, is paved

**M:** notes a difference between design and management: Hoodoos is well designed but doesn't think many trails are well managed because aren't resources to maintain them

**S:** points out that lots of trails weren't produced intentionally but rather were "forged", especially within past five to ten years: e.g. Hoodoos was only half km long *intentionally*, but now there's a "labyrinth" of trails; this is a huge issue → there isn't any trail management or perception of it because "who knows where the trails are?"

- this network is felt by locals to be their "freedom to go out...and explore";
- feels that new and long-term locals have different perceptions of what is or isn't appropriate trail use
- what is 'well managed'? for S personally, "hell man, the fact that I'm able to be here, the fact that I'm actually able to go on these trails; I'm living in a national park...my god, to me the opportunity that I'm able to be even included in this process I feel quite fortunate and I ...appreciate that in terms of the management strategy that I'm actually still able to live here and go out on the trails"

**I:** believes that up until a few years ago when trail maintenance was reduced, Banff residents were spoiled with respect to trail system: has had European visitors who are astonished by how many trails are here, how they are maintained, etc.; in Europe, they don't really have national parks and only voluntary groups "who do what they can so it's uneven what can be achieved"

**D:** asks if someone can explain how trails were managed differently/better twenty years ago, because considers Fenland well-managed because it has the little bridges, etc. but someone said that was design, not management, so asks "what is management?"

**D2:** every year they had trails crew go out

**M:** two things: (1) had more resources in the past: things have been allowed to deteriorate over time so now very expensive to fix e.g., parts of Tunnel trail are "beautifully constructed" but breaking down for lack of maintenance; (2) change in the composition and intensity of use e.g., mountain bikes are doing braiding of trails over by Hoodoos "and I know because I was one of them" (**laughter**); says there was almost no impact when started riding there because was very little use, but now lot more use; also have ditches forming on Tunnel with people downhill riding or riding in inappropriate conditions (i.e., wet)

**M and J:** discuss downhill biking and how it's different, and has different impact

**M:** Parks has not responded to this change even though it's obvious it's taking place; not totally Parks' fault because they do lack resources

- "what scares me is the prospect that if this continues then we're going to lose access to these very important resources"

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If you had one minute to talk to the senior managers at Parks Canada, what would you say?

**M2:** education programs, every issue boils down to education

**I:** restore a reasonable budget and do long-term planning

**K:** vision of how we'd like the park to be

**J:** Parks' management is to preserve what is here; money is available, it's just being misappropriated (e.g., amount of money

being squandered on whole RCMP-warden issue)

- regarding wildlife management: can't just cut down the trees, can't just close all the trails; have to put resources into monitoring wildlife and informing public

**M2:** back to well-maintained trails: Sundance trail is "dream trail" because paved, horse use on the side, width allows for bike use, has picnic area and bathrooms; but notes that means well-maintained for *tourists* and that probably "none of us" want to hike that type of trail

**Group discusses Sundance: was an old road that was closed, important to have this type of opportunity available, wheelchair access etc.**

**M:** key point is that there's a multiplicity of users with different interests and Parks should manage to reflect this: need paved, wheelchair accessible but also some that aren't well-defined, etc.

**S:** it's still a national park, and it's not an urban park, so what we do and our impacts must be taken into consideration

**J2:** local people know and use the area intimately: "we're storehouses of information as to how things are actually being used"; this is an underpinning [of trail management] that hasn't been discussed e.g., stewardship aspect or volunteering to maintain trails, informing people when out on a hike

**J:** "Parks has to see people, this group here, as a resource, not as the problem"...caring and knowledgeable (**agreement**)

**D:** I've talked with lots of other locals and they don't want any part of this study because all they see is "trail management = trail closure", so it needs to be articulated more that that's not what this is about

**M:** the people that tend to have the voice in the process tend to represent groups with commercial power, it's very difficult for the average person who's not a member of the group ("we don't hike in groups, we don't

recreate in groups other than with our friends") to have an impact on what happens

**S:** Calgarians to some degree and Canmorites also consider themselves to be locals; therefore, important that any sort of public outreach or education be done on this larger scale

**M:** would differentiate between "local" and people who live nearby, but agrees with S's point because has spoken with lots of Calgarians who now go to K-Country because don't like all the restrictions; notes this is good and bad (**laughter**)

**J:** question of how things are presented; relates story of forming voluntary hiking guide group and got the feeling that a Parks person involved with the process didn't want the group to go anywhere; individual was very negative, meanwhile, here is a group of volunteers wanting to help people get out on the trails

**J:** Parks in the past has practiced "benediction process": come up with policy, go out for public input to get benediction...and then come back and say this is what people wanted; partly why people have 'negative' attitudes

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**Moderator: is there anything that you feel you need to add, that hasn't come up yet?**

**M2:** remarks on sense of agreement within the group despite different backgrounds, ages, etc.

**M:** agrees with J's point: calling a process open, transparent and participatory doesn't make it that way

**Group ends at 7:31 p.m.**

**Recreational Use of the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff  
Summary of Discussions**

**Focus Group #8: Residents at Large – On foot, Group 2**

8:00-9:30 p.m., Thursday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 Boardroom, Banff YWCA, Banff, AB

Eight Participants

Moderator: Carole Stark

Scribe: Melissa Mauro

Introductory discussion about focus groups and the planning process (and timelines) for the Lands Adjacent study.

Course; goes out for fitness and to get away from people

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**Lets go around the table and tell everybody a bit about your use of the trails in this area.**

**B:** favourite trail is “Cascade loop”: start at Norquay and go right around Cascade down fire road; started doing this in mid-80’s on his bike and now bikes not allowed: one of the reasons he’s at the focus group – doesn’t agree with this

**M:** resident since 1956; doesn’t use trails as much as used to but still likes to walk and birdwatch at Marsh Loop, Vermilion and Tunnel trails; getting “kind of paranoid about bears now that I’ve ...run through my nine lives of not meeting them” so walks in town more than in the past; also used to have dog and that got her out more, also has less energy for longer hikes now

**A:** resident for two and a half years; works for a destination management company; has been on most of the study area trails; favourite is walking at Cave and Basin because it’s quiet and likes to observe natural environment; also uses Fenland and Tunnel frequently

**A2:** resident of Valley View; out on trails everyday for a couple hours, partly because has dog; chooses trail that hasn’t been on for a while, or whatever’s closest, or depending on time of day w.r.t. sun (e.g., Cave and Basin or Airstrip this time of year good for sun later in day); Fenland is a favourite – often goes around twice a day and “never gets sick of it”

**N:** has three kids and is usually with them on trails; walks at Sulphur, Fenland and Tunnel ~ 3 times/week, bikes on Spray Loop; goes to get away from people: e.g. bikes down Sundance then walks in canyon because knows aren’t many people; also goes to get kids out in the woods; disagrees with Parks discouraging use on trails e.g., trail to Temple Lake is not advertised: “starting to annoy me that trails are getting shut down just because they don’t want people there”

**J:** resident since 1953; last few years walks on trails in area to rebuild following surgery and injuries; resident of Valley View and favourite trail through Middle Springs is now closed --used to walk it every day, at least five times a week; has a dog and walks with it; walks behind Valley View towards Rimrock and Sulphur; likes C-level Cirque

**D:** resident for 11 years; primarily runs on trails in study area; uses Marsh Loop, Sundance, Fenland, Vermilion most, Spray and Golf Course Loop occasionally; birdwatches too; use of trails is really important to quality of life: “it’s why I’m here”

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**You have cards and a pen in front of you. I’d like to give you about thirty seconds to write your first reactions to a phrase I’m going to give you. The phrase is “trail management”**

**L:** just moved to Banff in May; feels that living in a national park is “pretty awesome and it’s a totally new experience for me”; hasn’t used many trails yet but does use Vermilion, Sundance Canyon, Cave and Basin, Golf

**L:** human/ecological balance; horses/ bikers/ hikers...activity balance; maintenance

– balancing priorities so that everyone can get the best out of the trails

**D:** closures; maintenance; wildlife; user conflicts; wildlife warnings

- wildlife: balancing wildlife issues with human use
- conflicts: between different user groups
- managing wildlife hazards and warnings

**N:** Parks Canada uses this term for closure; open, accessible, well-maintained, useable

- every time your read 'trail management' by Parks in the paper, means it's been closed

**A:** controlling use; maintenance; preventing damage; balancing with needs of natural environment

- controlling different types of use: i.e., closing areas to certain activities and managing it so it stays closed to them
- upkeep and closing off sections where shortcutting is occurring; preventing damage
- allowing humans to use areas when this doesn't conflict with wildlife

**B:** maintenance; education; policing

- education: informing public of trail situation e.g., bears in area, etc.
- policing: wardens enforcement

**J:** monitoring trail use; specialized use of particular trails; maintenance and responsibility

- how to monitor trail use
- specialized use: meaning different types of use on different trails "i.e., bicycles and walking because they don't mix"
- who is responsible for maintenance?

**A2:** design; restrictions and rules; maintenance

- design: new trails need to be laid out and designed whether for 'destination' or 'pleasure loop'/ 'nature walk'; but notes aren't many new trails
- restrictions: e.g., no horses, dogs or bikes or restrictions that apply to a particular area such as the group size restriction at Moraine; doesn't see much of the latter type
- maintenance: does Parks have the money to keep trails in good shape?

**M:** sharing; safety; maintenance

- sharing: should be some restrictions re: which type of use on which trails – should be planned and stuck to; e.g., shouldn't be mountain bikers up at top of Tunnel; used to work for Parks and said "one of the biggest complaints [from people] were the horses"
- safety: feels there have to be restrictions regarding bears, for example, and having groups go is excellent solution rather than flat closures
- maintenance: if there is a good built trail people will stay on it, won't get braided and "mushed up"

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**Thinking of your experiences and observations on trails in this area, I'd like you to identify three issues related to trail use and management in this area. These can be broad ecological, social or process-related issues; or very specific.**

**Write one on each card and then put them up on the board one at time. If you see any issue that you feel is similar to another, group them together.**

**N:** (1) downhill biking Norquay bussing up, riding down, end result closure; (2) elk management – predators – wildlife corridors – trail problems; and (3) trusting Parks Canada – vision, accuracy, honesty

- not opposed to mountain biking on trails, but has issue with downhill biking because feels their abuse of their right to mountain bike has resulted in closures for all bikers
- pushing elk to town periphery has created a predator "buffet" which in turn has led to trail/area closures on the periphery; notes have been many predator sightings close to Town in recent years and is unhappy that can't let kids go up to Middle Springs now without any adult supervision [for fear of predators in area]; "I don't actually have a problem with wildlife corridors except there being so many now that it's chopping into trails"; feels corridors are arbitrarily "put up" and with no input from people who use the trails: wonders "why is there a wildlife corridor there as opposed to somewhere else, I'm sure they haven't done a survey as to how widely it was used prior to shutting it down"

- doesn't trust Parks Canada's vision or the accuracy of reports behind trail closures; e.g., "I know for a fact they closed down, or put restrictions on Paradise Valley...and the bear wasn't there at the time", was told that Parks just wanted to limit amount of people there – why?; doesn't think Parks is honest or that there is enough input from residents – decisions come more directly from Ottawa and Parks
- another example of why doesn't trust Park's vision: elk management –Parks directed CP to let grass on golf course grow higher to increase predation potential; there was one wolf attack there and Park's response was to set traps; were two bears down there and Parks "routed them out"; doesn't make sense

**A:** (1) disregard for/of closures or closed areas or restrictions; (2) damage to existing trails; and (3) user balance

- disregard is mostly due to lack of understanding, especially where new residents are concerned; but some people do know better (e.g., mountain bikers on Tunnel); Parks doesn't seem to do much about it
- damage: e.g., braiding at Fenland; shouldn't introduce new trails because more trails leads to more damage; there's 10 million people drive through in a year "so the more places we give them to destroy in this environment, the worse it is for the habitat and wildlife"
- personally afraid of bumping into a mountain biker on corners of trails at Tunnel; should be trails for biking only; thinks only half of biking population will respect only using these trails, but at least would be less bike use on hiking trails and hikers could feel more secure

**A2:** doesn't remember ever reading about someone being hurt by collision with a biker

**J:** I do, I still have the t-shirt with the tracks up the back

**N:** knows that a minority of mountain bikers totally don't care about hikers

**A:** echoes N's remarks

**A2:** a lot of this stuff is just manners

**B:** there's a bad egg in every group

**A:** there's really no options for those of us that do have manners

**M:** "I think the cyclists win the prize for being the worst"; says cyclists in town ride with disregard for rules of road

**B:** skateboarders too (**agreement from some others**)

**M:** (1) overuse; (2) enforced restrictions; and (3) protection of natural features

- overuse and excessive promotion of tourism: remembers that before Banff townsite became a Town [i.e., incorporated] was at Bow Valley Naturalist meeting where someone said "there is no place for an active chamber of commerce" in a national park – now have a tourism board heavily promoting; this is a problem: what are all the tourists going to do without wearing out popular places? e.g., notes hardening work done up at Surprise Corner this fall and that this type of "unnatural" maintenance will only increase if continue to invite more tourism
  - restrictions: can't necessarily have wardens at every trail, but education is not necessarily solution either because people breaking rules know it
  - built trails can help to protect areas because people will stay on them
  - notes loss of land that is now Tatanga Ridge: used to walk from home on Deer St. - Campground road - Inns of Banff and would see many unusual birds, but now it's Tatanga Ridge and no birds
  - does trust Parks Canada, worked for Parks for 14 years and knows that lots of employees work very hard
- N:** agrees that the few dealings he's had with individuals in Parks have been fine; what he mistrusts are the "stories" of elk management because "I hear them saying this and I know they're not doing it"

**N and M discuss issue of trust with Parks in relation to Paradise Valley example from earlier**

**J:** (1) bicycles, horses and people on the same trails; (2) who maintains and monitors trails? warden registration for closed trails; and (3) areas where dogs can be off-leash legally

- concerned with “bicycles, horses and people on the same trails”: would like to see some way of separating user groups (perhaps different days of the week?); relates being run down by couple kids on bikes on Middle Springs trail who were particularly nasty
- suggests that cyclists do not care for trails as do hikers: e.g., trail behind Valley View through swampy terrain – locals have laid down boards but cyclists displace the boards and don't replace them
- as a taxpayer, wonders who is responsible for maintaining and monitoring the trails, is it federal or Town of Banff? (**someone clarifies that inside town boundary it's the town while outside it's Parks**) wonders if couldn't work out an agreement between town and park for town to contribute to safer use and maintenance

#### **Discussion among participants re: number of residents in Valley View and Middle Springs area who use trails**

- would like to have some area where dogs could be off-leash without being fined; has a puppy who would “sure like to run, even for two minutes”

**A2:** Cascade Pits

**M:** Indian Grounds

**J:** yes, but it's not legal!

**A2:** wardens must waste a lot of time telling people to put their dog on leash; why not allow Cascade Pits? It's a “totally sterile, manmade, artificial open field...and yet you will get fined for having your dog running around”

**J:** but if I'm out there on a picnic I don't want to step in poop either

**A:** thought the issue regarding leash laws is related to grizzly bears and human safety, plus consequence for a bear if does go after people or their dogs

**A2:** but at Cascade there are two major roads, a picnic area, and a huge, empty field “if there ever was a place where a dog could get off a leash for a few minutes and not upset the balance of nature...”; most citizens don't take dog off-leash law seriously when they're in a place that looks so much like a “full-on, off-leash dog area type of park”

**M to A2:** asks if wardens stop A2 when he is walking with his dog off-leash? A2 replies “hardly ever”

**A2:** (1) keep a buffer or “warning track” around Banff - both people and wild animals need a zone where there's a transition from town to wilderness. Human smells, bike tracks; and (2) “dogs are not a crime” – dogs are a bridge between civilization and the wild. Dogs can behave just fine and not upset animals. Train them.; and (3) a wild animal encounter isn't often a bad thing. Animals can easily handle a bit of contact with well mannered humans

- buffer zone around the town: where there's enough people using trails that wild animals will get nervous *before* they're in people's yards or “out of their corridor”; problem now is that animals don't know how close they are to being in town, and when they do come in Parks often removes or destroys them (possibly out of fear of liability); buffer would also reduce burden of “enforcing such a tight thing where everybody lives and everybody naturally just wants to get into the bush at the closest place from wherever they live”
  - dogs are healthy for people because they get people out; believes that wild animals are not necessarily disturbed by dogs (e.g., bighorn sheep are curious and check you out with a dog) if dog is well-behaved; agrees should be on a leash but key is really that they should be well-trained; nervous [about potential restrictions on dogs] because of “anti-dog people” who consider them a problem e.g., for years has heard talk about danger of having a dog in areas with bears, but has never had a problem
- N:** doesn't have a dog; sees lots of people with dogs off-leash but has no problem with this so long as they are in control, but acknowledges this is difficult to police



**A2:** an extension of politeness is that your dog is well-behaved too

- encounters between people and wild animals not a bad thing close to town; animals that repeatedly have ‘good’ encounters with people learn that the town is there and that people aren’t ‘bad news’; they’ll get used to us somewhat; “it’s up to the animals to get used to the fact that there’s a town here but also we have to behave and not chase them, harass them, keep our pets...in control”

**M:** does anyone remember when there used to be lots of bears in town?

**A:** were there a lot of attacks?

**M:** no, our kids walked to school and if there was a bear you’d just go around; bears would come around on garbage days

**N:** tourists or transients (new residents) may not behave as well as longer term residents around wildlife; influx of short-term summer residents who “leave their brains at home” has increased ten-fold

**M:** there are so many new restaurants that require staff

**A:** are people saying that wildlife corridors are taking away from our enjoyment of the area?

**A2:** no, the problem is that wildlife corridors are literally up against backyards, so wild animals come into the yards, scare people, then wardens monitor and “next time an animal looks sideways at something, he’s dead”; reiterates belief that need use on trails in corridors so that animals can learn to avoid going further into town

**Discussion among some participants re: tight spots for animals to pass around town, sightings of wolves on the edge of town, etc.**

**D:** (1) fear that trail use will be targeted to redress human/wildlife balance because it is politically easier than tackling commercial use issues; (2) uncertainty/difficulty of science related to human/wildlife interaction; and (3) as a human powered user of trails, I believe that I am using the Park as the National Parks Act intends

- has “great paranoia” regarding first point: if Parks had to make a decision to enhance wildlife balance, would axe trail use first

**L:** has this happened already?

**D:** it is hard to deal with commercial use issues

**N:** relates to biking too – Parks is much more likely to shut down bike club that doesn’t pay to maintain trails compared to a horse operation which does pay to use trails

**D:** science of human-wildlife interaction is so complex and people at Parks would admit this; not an issue of mistrust of Parks, rather a recognition of the complexity of the situation: “to make a wise decision is extremely difficult, and to know what the impact of a closure will be is extremely difficult” e.g., history of elk management – swung from one direction to another, or e.g., “I think Parks was as surprised as any of us with the impact of what they did to further predators into town...”

- national park is for human beings as well as for wildlife; using it in a human-powered manner while appreciating wildlife and scenery is what a national park is for; any decision affecting this should be taken very carefully

**M:** tell that to Brewsters (laughter)

**L:** (1) conservation education; (2) policing; and (3) dog off-leash area

- education important: believes that if people understand what’s going on in the park they will use it wisely and give back, but acknowledges it’s difficult to do; education also related to need for residents to be more involved in decision-making – they will better understand why decisions are being made and will feel better about them
- policing: gets frustrated when sees people on trails who shouldn’t be and they’re getting away with it; whole thing snowballs – people do it more and more
- off-leash area: does not have a dog, but would like one and knows this is an important issue

- **B:** (1) usage – trails should be multi-use and open to everyone, bikes should have bells to warn bicycles, horses and people on the same trails; (2) closure – not in favour of closing trails. There should be interaction between wildlife and man with proper education; and (3) maintenance - trails should be paved to prevent erosion and to keep urbanites on trails rather than goat paths

- in 1985 received permission from wardens to clear a trail down Norquay for mountain bike use ("though they probably wouldn't (N interjects "admit to it")...exactly")
- trails should be multi-use and mountain bikers should adhere to proper etiquette
- trails shouldn't be closed, especially not for things like a sow bear in the area; believes should be interaction because it's been happening for millenia and "if you take the human element away from the bears and when they do finally come into a person who knows what could happen"
- feels all trails within 1 day ride (horse or bike) should be paved to prevent erosion and to keep people on them

**N:** that's a long way [i.e., within a 1day ride]

**B:** but there are examples of paved trails: e.g., short section at Hoodoos is nice

**J:** Johnston Canyon too

**B:** well designated trails would keep even mountain bikers off of the "goat paths", though they do go a lot slower on goat paths

**N:** can see some of the more popular trails being fortified or even paved because of sheer volume of use, but feels it takes away from the mountain experience

**L:** I wouldn't use it if it was paved

**B:** depends on what your definition of the word 'nature' is: dictionary meaning is 'physical world', and that means a car is natural

**N:** if I had a choice of paved or regular trail that hasn't been touched (other than walking on it), I would go for the hasn't been touched

**B:** I would like the paved one

### Issues as grouped by participants

- conservation education
- downhill biking Norquay bussing up, riding down, end result closure
- damage to existing trails
- trusting Parks Canada – vision, accuracy, honesty
- uncertainty/difficulty of science related to human/wildlife interaction
- fear that trail use will be targeted to redress human/wildlife balance because it is politically easier than tackling commercial use issues
- as a human powered user of trails, I believe that I am using the Park as the National Parks Act intends
- protection of natural features
- "dogs are not a crime" – dogs are a bridge between civilization and the wild. Dogs can behave just fine and not upset animals. Train them.
- areas where dogs can be off-leash legally
- dog off-leash area
- elk management – predators – wildlife corridors – trail problems
- keep a buffer or "warning track" around Banff - both people and wild animals need a zone where there's a transition from town to wilderness. Human smells, bike tracks
- a wild animal encounter isn't often a bad thing. Animals can easily handle a bit of contact with well mannered humans
- enforced restrictions
- disregard for/of closures or closed areas or restrictions
- policing
- user balance
- usage – trails should be multi-use and open to everyone, bikes should have bells to warn bicycles, horses and people on the same trails
- maintenance - trails should be paved to prevent erosion and to keep urbanites on trails rather than goat paths
- who maintains and monitors trails? warden registration for closed trails

- closure – not in favour of closing trails.  
There should be interaction between wildlife and man with proper education
- over use

**I'd like you to point out what trails in the study area you think are well-managed? This is based on your own criteria of what a well-managed trail is.**

**M:** along the river in town is good because provides access for people in wheelchairs, with strollers, etc.; would be nice to have few trails like this

**D:** Marsh Loop and Sundance; agrees that rarely sees conflict on Sundance trail from multi-use, probably because it's wide – can always hear mountain bikers and see horses coming; doesn't mind stopping running to let horses go by "I like multi-use, I like to see different people out there; it reflects to me again what national parks are for – they're for everybody"; trails get muddy but not bad

**A:** mountain bikers and horses can't go on most of that loop can they?

**D and N clarify**

**Moderator probe: clarify → in some cases it might be possible to have horses there and in other cases people are saying in nice to have them separate?**

**D:** spouse hates horses (runs too) – feels they mess up the trail and doesn't like having to stop; D personally doesn't mind: "10 seconds and a horse train goes by, big deal"

**A:** major problem is not horses it's volume (**comments of agreement from others, note that it will only get worse**); if it were just the odd person in town going out for a horse back or bike ride, no problem really

**Moderator probe: when you think about your favourite trails, how much of the reason why is because it's well-managed and how much is due to other aspects?**

**D:** prefers 'managed' trails because usually running and doesn't want to be watching feet all the time for roots

**N:** uses both types of trails – if with inexperienced hikers will choose a managed trail, or trail close to town; if with kids for bike or hike will go wherever: e.g., took son on Goat Creek because never done it before, and "we knew it wasn't exactly a managed trail, and that's the reason we went on it" as well as to just be outside enjoying

**M:** but it was a trail, you didn't just cut through – you stayed on the trail

**N:** oh yeah, you have to...is always telling children that can't go off-trail, shortcutting; but sees people doing it all the time – believes it comes back to policing

– thinks maybe should be a resident pass that allows residents closer to wildlife corridors, recognizing fact that it's their backyard and that use of trails is basically the reason most people choose to live in Banff: "I live in the mountains, ten minutes away from a trail, and I would like to be able to use that"; acknowledges would be difficult to police – who would do this?

**A2:** important to keep perspective when upset about closures: anybody else living just about anywhere else in Canada has to deal with private land, fences, no trespassing (**agreement from couple others**); "here, you get uptight if 1% of Banff Park gets closed X amount of times...let's go somewhere else, there's always more somewhere else's than you'll ever get to in your life"

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**If you had one minute to talk to senior managers at Parks about the issues or your thoughts on trail management, what would be the one key point you would want to get across?**

**N:** I live here for the lifestyle, "this is my backyard and I would like to be able to use it in a conscientious manner"; but acknowledges that hard to do this when you get 6000 people wanting to do the same

**B:** I'd like them to get back to the original mandate of the park

**A:** for the enjoyment of the people?

**B:** yes

**A2 to B:** you're not enjoying yourself because you can't go to one place that you used to go to?

**B:** it's numerous places – especially Johnson Lake to Harvie Heights

**A:** but look at how good that is

**M:** can you still go up the Cascade Fire Road?

**B:** not by mountain bike anymore

**A2:** you can go up 8 km

**B:** "in '62 you could take your volkswagen up there, I wish I could take my truck up there"

**M:** I've been up there [in car]

**B:** you're one of the lucky ones, I've been denied that

**Moderator:** any other messages?

**M:** "be specific about what's opened and what's closed and what's allowed and be transparent about the reasons"

**L:** communication issue: having people more involved in decisions would help to address issues of mistrust of Parks

**A2:** agrees, remarks that residents are befuddled by whole gun/warden/RCMP issue....it's been up in the air for close to a year now and it has to be solved, how much longer will it go on?

**N:** agrees that gun issue has brought out lots of inadequacies from upper managers

**A2 and N:** wardens' ability to patrol has been neutered, RCMP is not patrolling park as wardens did; opportunity for abuse is high

**Scribe:** can we just bring the discussion back to the "1 minute" question – is there anyone else who hasn't had their one minute and would like to give their 'platform'?

**A:** has many different thoughts, but would say "manage what we have now and not

introduce something else"; get control of what we have and try to minimize impact on the environment: "leave what's closed closed"; we need to go back to the new mandate of balancing ecological integrity – "has to be our number 1 focus and their number 1 focus"; agrees with L and M that can't do anything without people understanding reasons why – shares personal examples of her own lack of understanding when first arrived, but also feels that educating everyone is "probably an impossible task"

**Moderator summarizes conversation and asks if there is anything that was missed or any points that haven't yet come up that should be discussed.**

**A2:** would be good to have a name and a face at Parks that is associated with trails, someone who knows the local trails and who would help coordinate everybody else

**M:** that is the drawback with Parks, just when someone starts to know what they're talking about, they get moved

**D:** one minute with managers: don't look at trails in isolation – consider all uses: commercial, transportation corridors, hotels, etc when looking at addressing what the National Parks Act is trying to do (balance between EI and human appreciation, enjoyment); trails are a very minor portion of the picture

**B:** will the results of the survey be for every national park?

**Scribe:** clarifies that no, survey was very specific to Banff and the Banff townsite

**Moderator:** focus groups too are specific for Banff townsite and Banff park

**D:** so Parks isn't looking at this across the country, just here

**Scribe:** human use is definitely a rising issue across the country but the Lands Adjacent project and why you're here tonight is Banff-specific

**Group ends at 9:30 p.m.**