

Proposal for Connecting East and West Kootenay's via a Community-Sourced Mountain Bike and e-Mountain Bike Trail Network
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Executive Summary

We propose the development of a community-sourced mountain bike and e-mountain bike (eMTB) trail network connecting the East and West Kootenay's through either Earl Grey Pass or Jumbo Pass. This initiative aims to create a world-class, sustainable trail system that leverages the region's natural beauty, rich cultural history, and vibrant biking community to deliver significant economic, health, and cultural benefits. The project will align with the BC Recreation Sites and Trails mandate, ensuring all trails are developed as an "Authorized Trail Area" in partnership with local organizations such as the Nelson Cycling Club and the Columbia Valley Cycling Society in Invermere. By integrating the region's unique Beef Trail and mining history, this trail network will offer an unparalleled recreational and cultural experience, fostering community pride, tourism, and sustainable outdoor recreation.

Project Overview Objective

To establish a multi-use, community-sourced mountain bike and eMTB trail network connecting the East and West Kootenay's, utilizing either Earl Grey Pass and/or Jumbo Pass, to promote economic growth, enhance public health, and celebrate the region's cultural uniqueness, while adhering to BC Recreation Sites and Trails standards, namely at:

Earl Grey Pass: A 61 km trail through the Purcell Mountains, historically used by First Nations and miners in the late 1800s, connecting Toby Creek (near Invermere) to Argenta near Kootenay Lake. This route offers diverse terrain, from old-growth forests to challenging river crossings, and is steeped in history, including Earl Grey's 1909 cabin. The recent Hamill Creek fire of 2024 offers a perfect opportunity to engage in properly rebuilding this landmark trail without the fear of blowdowns for another generation or more

Jumbo Pass: A shorter, high-alpine route in the Purcell Mountains, accessible from Invermere, offering stunning views and technical single-track. This pass is less logistically complex but equally scenic, with potential for integration into existing trail networks like those at Panorama Resort

Both routes would be evaluated for environmental impact, trail sustainability, and community support to determine the optimal path

Benefits Economic

Tourism Boost: The Kootenay's are already a renowned mountain biking destination, with Nelson and Invermere attracting riders globally. A connected trail network will enhance the region's appeal, drawing more visitors to events like Sufferfest and the Fat Tire Festival. In 2022, mountain biking tourism in BC contributed millions to local economies, with Nelson and Invermere seeing significant revenue from bike shops, accommodations, and dining

Job Creation: Trail construction, maintenance, and related services (e.g., bike rentals, guiding) will create jobs for local residents. Partnerships with organizations like the Nelson Cycling Club and Columbia Valley Cycling Society will support trail crew employment and volunteer opportunities

Local Business Growth: Increased visitor traffic will benefit local businesses, including Kicking Horse Coffee and Arrowhead Brewing Company in Invermere, and eateries like Frog Peak Cafe and Ymir General Store along the route. The trail's proximity to hot springs (e.g., Ainsworth and Fairmont) will further drive tourism revenue. The closure of the sole restaurant and pub in Meadow Creek has left a gap in local amenities, reducing the area's capacity to attract and retain visitors. The development of a world-class trail network can address this gap, revitalizing tourism, lodging, and the broader local economy in the following ways

Health Benefits

Physical Activity: The trail network will encourage outdoor recreation, promoting cardiovascular health, muscle strength, and mental well-being. eMTBs make trails accessible to a broader demographic, including older adults and those with physical limitations, fostering inclusive fitness opportunities

Mental Health: Immersion in nature, as experienced on trails like those in the Kootenai's, reduces stress and enhances mental clarity. The peaceful, crowd-free settings of Earl Grey and Jumbo Pass provide ideal environments for mindfulness and relaxation

Community Engagement: Collaborative trail-building and maintenance by groups like the Nelson Cycling Club and Columbia Valley Cycling Society foster social connections, reducing isolation and building community resilience

Cultural Uniqueness

Beef Trail Connection: The trail will highlight the Kootenay's historic "beef trail," a route used to transport cattle in the 19th century, connecting to the region's ranching heritage. Interpretive signage can educate riders about this legacy, enriching their experience

Mining History: Both Earl Grey and Jumbo Pass traverse areas significant to the Kootenay mining boom in the late 1800s. Trails near abandoned sites like the Mineral King mine (near Jumbo Pass) can feature historical markers, celebrating the region's industrial past and its transition to recreation-based tourism

Indigenous Heritage: The trails cross Sinixt, Syilx, and Ktunaxa lands, offering opportunities to collaborate with Indigenous communities to incorporate cultural storytelling, such as the history of pit houses at Xat'sūll Heritage Village or Nisga'a connections to the land

Economic Development Potential

Tourism Growth

The northern Kootenay Lake area is already recognized for its stunning natural beauty, including pristine rivers, lakes, and backcountry trails like Monica Meadows, Jumbo Pass, and Earl Grey Pass. A dedicated mountain bike and eMTB trail network would amplify this appeal by creating a marquee attraction for adventure tourists, particularly mountain bikers, who are a growing demographic in British Columbia. In 2022, mountain biking tourism in BC generated millions in revenue for communities like Nelson and Invermere, and a similar impact is feasible for the northern Kootenay Lake area. A dedicated trail system will mean less cars on the highways and will offer a truly world class experience being able to move from one side to the other in a fraction of the time it takes to highway drive in order to reach these areas through:

Increased Visitor Numbers: The trail network would draw domestic and international riders, leveraging the region's proximity to Nelson (a hub for mountain biking) and the Kootenay Lake Ferry, the longest free scenic ferry ride in the world. Events like Sufferfest or a new "Kootenay Traverse" race could attract hundreds of participants and spectators, boosting visitor numbers

Seasonal Extension: A trail network can operate year-round, with summer biking and winter fat-tire biking or snowshoeing. This extends the tourism season beyond summer, into the shoulder seasons stabilizing revenue for local businesses

Eco-Tourism Opportunities: The area's pristine wilderness and low population density make it ideal for eco-focused travelers. Partnerships with eco-tourism operators, as noted in the region's hiking offerings, could bundle trail access with sustainable lodging and guided tours, appealing to environmentally conscious visitors

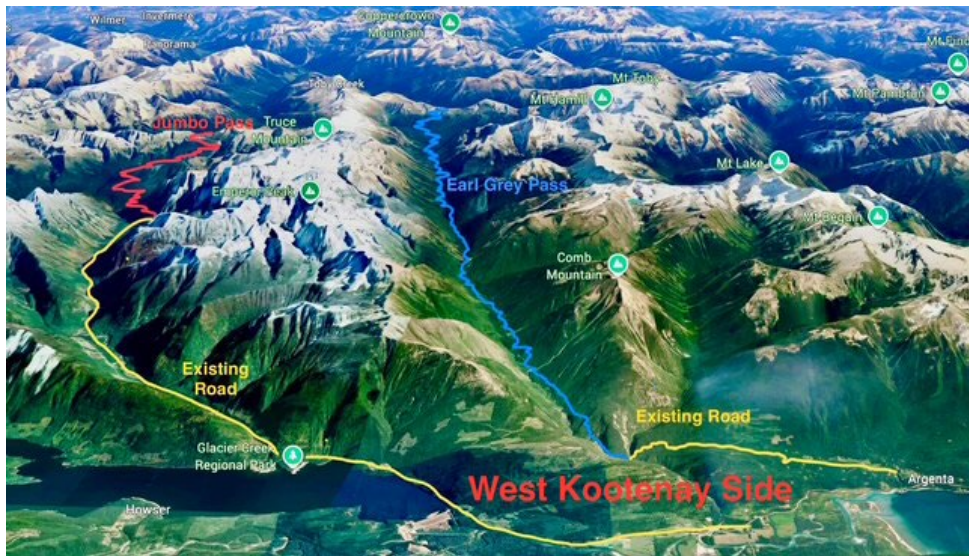
The Kootenay's Competitive Advantage – cheap sustainable power

Low Electricity Costs

BC Hydro offers some of the lowest electricity rates in North America, with residential rates averaging around 10-12 cents per kWh in rural BC (as of 2025). In the northern Kootenay Lake area, where population density is low (approximately 400 residents across seven communities), electricity demand is minimal, making the grid underutilized and ideal for supporting new infrastructure like eMTB charging stations

Clean Energy Source

BC Hydro generates over 90% of its electricity from renewable hydroelectric power, aligning with the region's eco-tourism ethos and the "Play Clean Go" principles of sustainable trail development. This clean energy minimizes the environmental footprint of eMTB charging compared to fossil fuel-based alternatives



Existing Infrastructure

Recent investments, such as the 2023 high-speed internet and infrastructure upgrades in Argenta and surrounding areas, indicate reliable electrical grid access. Facilities like the WiFi-enabled Davis Creek campground as well as the well connected municipality of Panorama, demonstrate the region's capacity to integrate modern amenities, making eMTB charging stations a feasible addition

The existing, underutilized and cost-effective BC Hydro Electricity is a powerful asset for developing eMTB charging infrastructure to support the proposed trail network. By offering affordable, clean energy, the region can attract a diverse range of riders, boost tourism, and stimulate economic activity in both the East and West Kootenay's. Charging stations would aid in the creation of new opportunities for hospitality, job creation, and community engagement while reinforcing the area's commitment to sustainability and cultural heritage. This initiative would solidify the Kootenay's as a premier eMTB destination, driving long-term prosperity in alignment with BC Recreation Sites and Trails standards

Lodging Revitalization

Lodging resources would stand to benefit significantly:

New Lodging Opportunities: The trail's appeal could spur the development of campgrounds, glamping sites, or eco-lodges, similar to those at Davis Creek and Lost Ledge campgrounds, which offer lakefront access and stunning views. For example, a reopened or new pub could double as a lodge or café, serving as a trailhead hub with bike rentals, food, and accommodation

Existing Infrastructure Utilization: Existing resorts and campgrounds in the Lardeau Valley, as mentioned in tourism resources, could expand to accommodate trail users. The trail's connection to Kootenay Lake Park, with its WiFi-enabled Davis Creek campground, could attract remote workers seeking a "working sabbatical" while biking

Economic Multiplier Effect: Lodging revenue would support related services like guiding, shuttle services (e.g., to trailheads), and bike rentals, as seen with Kootenay Lake Paddle Sports at Davis Creek. This would create a self-reinforcing cycle of tourism-driven growth

Community Involvement

Local Biking Community

Nelson Cycling Club: A key partner, the NCC has a proven track record of managing trails like Mountain Station and Giveout, which are part of BC Recreation Sites and Trails' Authorized Trail Areas. Their expertise in trail design, maintenance, and community engagement will ensure the project aligns with local needs and BC Parks standards

Columbia Valley Cycling Society (Invermere): This group maintains trails at Mt. Swansea and Lillian Lake, offering shuttle-accessed and cross-country options. Their involvement will ensure trails are sustainable and meet the needs of diverse riders, including eMTB users

Community Collaboration: Trail-building will involve volunteers, local riders, and Indigenous groups, fostering a sense of ownership and pride. Workshops, like those described at Xat'sūll Heritage Village, can integrate cultural education with trail development

Alignment with BC Recreation Sites and Trails

Authorized Trail Area: The trail network will be developed in partnership with BC Recreation Sites and Trails to ensure compliance with environmental and safety standards. Existing Authorized Trail Areas, like those at Morning Mountain (Nelson) and Lillian Lake (Invermere), provide a model for sustainable trail management

Environmental Stewardship: Trails will minimize soil disruption and avoid invasive species zones, adhering to "Play Clean Go" principles. Regular maintenance by local clubs will ensure long-term sustainability

Safety and Signage: Trail markers, emergency access points, and clear signage (as seen in the Lillian Lake network) will enhance rider safety and align with BC Parks guidelines

Implementation Plan Phase

Planning and Consultation (6-12 months)

Conduct feasibility studies for Earl Grey Pass and Jumbo Pass, assessing environmental impact, trail difficulty, and cultural significance

Engage with Nelson Cycling Club, Columbia Valley Cycling Society, and Indigenous communities (Sinixt, Syilx, Ktunaxa) to co-design the trail network

Secure permits from BC Recreation Sites and Trails to establish the trail as an Authorized Trail Area

Phase 2: Trail Development (12-24 months)

Construct trails with sustainable materials and techniques, prioritizing low-impact design

Install interpretive signage highlighting beef trail and mining history, developed in collaboration with local historians and Indigenous groups

Develop eMTB-friendly sections to ensure accessibility, drawing on expertise from Electric Larry Land (Nelson) and Columbia Cycle & Ski (Invermere)

Phase 3: Promotion and Maintenance (Ongoing)

Launch the trail with a community event, supported by Nelson and Invermere bike shops and tourism boards

Establish a maintenance fund through donations (e.g., Trail Karma) and grants, similar to those awarded in 2019 and 2025 for Kootenay trails

Promote the trail through Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism and Mountain Biking BC, leveraging platforms like Pinkbike, Trailforks, AllTrails and Strava

Budget Estimate

Planning and Consultation: \$50,000 (feasibility studies, community engagement)

Trail Construction: \$500,000 (labor, materials, signage)

Promotion and Events: \$30,000 (marketing, launch event)

Maintenance Fund: \$20,000/year (ongoing trail upkeep)

Total Initial Investment: **\$580,000**

Funding Sources:

Private donations, Provincial grants (e.g., ORV Trail Fund), donations via Trail Karma, and contributions from local businesses and tourism boards

Personal information has been withheld in accordance with section 22(1) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

Conclusion

The proposed mountain bike and eMTB trail network connecting the East and West Kootenay via Earl Grey or Jumbo Pass will deliver substantial economic, health, and cultural benefits. By celebrating the region's unique history, engaging local biking communities like the Nelson Cycling Club and Columbia Valley Cycling Society, and adhering to BC Recreation Sites and Trails standards, this project will create a sustainable, inclusive, and iconic trail system. Wearable GPS devices such as Strava already show people on both sides of the Kootenay's are trying very hard to connect. This project would enable it to happen in a much safer, more enjoyable way. We seek support from stakeholders to bring this vision to life, fostering a legacy of recreation, community, and cultural pride in the Kootenay's

About the Author

John Bell is a Geologist with over 40 years of experience in both Mineral Exploration as well as Oil and Natural Gas exploration. An avid skier and mountain biker, he's been a resident at Panorama BC since 1973. Most recently, he operated and owned one of Canada's largest backcountry Skiing and Hiking operation; Golden Alpine Holidays Inc. based in Golden BC from 2006-2020. John is also working alongside western Canadian based production companies and the local Regional District East Kootenay in order to bring the movie industry to the Columbia Valley. Most recently, operating as an Executive Producer for the movie "All Night Wrong" shot entirely in SE BC

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