

Off-road riders question summer RAMP

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Critics of a Bulkley Valley summer trails plan say its organizers are biased against quads and other off-road vehicles.

That was the key complaint put to volunteers behind the trails plan at a Telkwa council meeting last Wednesday.

Councillor Rick Fuerst said he knew the plan was flawed as soon as he found out it was run by the Bulkley Valley Community Resources Board.

"One only has to look at a lot of the correspondence and agendas of the [BVCRB] to see that they have an environmental, don't-touch-the-ground kind of lean," he said.

But Bob Henderson, new co-chair of the BVCRB subcommittee that selected people for the planning table, challenged that view and said critics should wait to see a draft plan due later this month.

"I think you'll be surprised by the balance in it," he said.

Starting this fall, four members of the public and eight members of local quadding, hiking, horse riding, and mountain biking societies have met each week to reach consensus decisions on how to manage the more than 75 summer trails that wind over Crown land in the Bulkley timber supply area.

But whether the summer Recreation Access Management Plan can strike a fair balance between those user groups has been hotly contested.

In early April, Ben Heemskerk resigned his role overseeing the RAMP because of a perceived conflict between his volunteer role and his work as a technician for Recreation Sites and Trails BC, the government agency responsible for RAMPs across B.C.

Although it found no actual conflict since Heemskerk had no authority to implement the RAMP, it did recommend he step down to avoid more problems.

Terri O'Neill, secretary of the B.V. Rod and Gun Club, said it's because of such competing roles in the BVCRB that her club stayed out.

"I stepped away because it was being infiltrated by bureaucrats," she said.

Regarding actual table members, critics such as Telkwa resident Ted Cullis said the fact six RAMP members own ATVs doesn't mean they share motorized users' interests.

"I own a chainsaw," Cullis asked.

"Does that make me a logger?"

But Henderson, who took over Heemskerk's role a month ago and heard those and other charges of bias, says they haven't been borne out.

"That table, as far as I can see, is as balanced as it could possibly be except maybe by gender," he said.

"When I heard that it was a bunch of young 'earth muffins' making these decisions, I walked into the room and the first people I saw were Ed Hinchcliffe, Casey Pyper and Eugene Bekar.

"I mean, these are people that are even older than Mayor Graf."

Henderson and Telkwa Councillor Rimas Zitkauskas both said the bigger issue is not about one recreation user versus another, but securing the place of public trails as logging, mining, and other developments grow in the valley.

"Believe me," said Henderson, "This approach is better

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