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Recreation plan seeks to protect backcountry recreation opportunities

(Smithers) The Bulkley Valley Community Resources Board (BVCRB) has received funding to create a summer Recreation Access Management Plan (RAMP) for the Bulkley Valley. The plan will seek to designate areas of the local backcountry for all forms of recreation including both motorized and non-motorized recreation.

“There’s room in our valley for all backcountry recreation enthusiasts,” said Ben Heemskerk, a member of the BVCRB who is helping organize the process. “When people look back 50 years from now, it would be great if they said we got it right.”

The RAMP will involve all of the major outdoor recreation clubs and associations as well as members of the public, and will be guided by a professional facilitator. The goal is to reach a consensus on a plan that can be submitted to the provincial government for approval.

“A Recreation Access Management Plan will be a huge benefit to the local area,” said Heemskerk. “Not only does backcountry recreation play an important role in our tourism economy, it also attracts and retains new residents.”

If the summer RAMP is a success, the BVCRB will undertake a similar process for winter recreation activities.

“We plan to use what we learn from the summer process to make the winter process even better,” said Heemskerk.

A selection committee is currently seeking applications from six representatives from outdoor recreation clubs and six members of the public at large who wish to participate in the RAMP process. Meetings will occur between September and December 2011.

The Bulkley Valley RAMP will contribute to a pilot project in the implementation of the BC Government's Provincial Trails Strategy. Both the Real Estate Foundation of BC and Recreation Sites and Trails BC have provided funding to support the process, with the Bulkley Valley Research Centre and Northwest Community College providing additional support.

A 2010 study estimated that tourism contributes over \$21 million annually to the Bulkley Valley economy.

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