

THE NARCISSIST OF LAND USE MANAGEMENT: MOUNTAIN BIKING AND  
THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AND  
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the complex dynamics of mountain bike tourism development in rural and Indigenous communities in British Columbia (BC). The growth of mountain biking throughout the province, as a foundational tourism product and a recreational pursuit, challenges development, the environment and livelihoods because it uses vast amounts of public and unceded land as its product. This research investigates how regions, traditionally reliant on natural resource industries are transitioning towards tourism-based economies, with a particular focus on trail infrastructure and mountain biking. Utilizing Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), the study explores the socio-cultural, environmental, and economic challenges associated with this shift, as well as the conflicts arising within communities and among different user groups. Drawing on 20 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including trail builders, Indigenous leaders, and tourism professionals, this study highlights the pressures placed on land managers, the critical role of volunteers, trail management organizations, and the impacts of unauthorized trail building. The findings reveal that while mountain bike tourism offers significant economic opportunities, it also exacerbates existing power imbalances in land use management, particularly in relation to Indigenous rights and title. By critically analyzing the colonial legacies embedded in current governance systems, this thesis advocates for a more equitable and sustainable approach to mountain bike tourism that respects Indigenous knowledge and promotes long-term environmental and socio-economic stewardship. Recommendations are provided to guide future mountain bike tourism development and land use planning toward more equitable and sustainable outcomes.

**Keywords:** Mountain bike tourism, rural communities, Indigenous communities, land use management, sustainability, volunteerism, colonialism, trail management, British Columbia, trail building, trail organization, mountain bike club, community-based research, recreation sites and trails

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the tourism industry in British Columbia (BC) contributed \$7.2 billion toward the province's gross domestic product. This is more than any other primary natural resource industry, including forestry (\$1.7 billion), and mining (\$5.4 billion) (Destination British Columbia, 2022). In Canada, the outdoor recreation industry, a subsector of the tourism industry, provides Canadians with \$98 billion in economic benefit (Llyod-Smith, 2021). This study focuses on BC, but to further grasp the scope of the industry, in the United States, outdoor recreation consumers spent \$887 billion USD in 2017 and \$682 billion in 2022 on recreational pursuits such as camping, fishing, wildlife viewing, and mountain biking (Outdoor Industry Association, 2017; Outdoor Industry Association, 2022). In 2016, mountain biking in the Sea-to-Sky Corridor of BC generated more than 687 jobs, paying over \$35 million in wages (Western Mountain Bike Tourism Association, 2016). The economic potential of outdoor recreation-based tourism, specifically mountain biking, is the primary factor that leads many community leaders and decision-makers in BC to consider utilizing the tourism industry to diversify their community's economy (Destination British Columbia, 2010).

Currently, many rural and Indigenous communities in BC that rely on resource extraction industries are having their livelihoods challenged by climate change. Climate change events such as forest fires and the mountain pine beetle have decreased the economic sustainability of natural resource industries (Ahmed et al., 2018; Nikiforuk, 2012). The impacts of climate change in Western Canada are shortening tourism operational seasons, restricting access to recreation sites, and compounding negative ecological impacts such trail erosion, pressure on wildlife habitat and disturbance sensitive ecosystems (Krishnaswamy et al., 2012; Knowles et al., 2024; Drolet & Sampson, 2017). Whether it is tourism, forestry, mining, or oil and gas, transitioning economies require participation in the provincial government land use management process and application of legislation and policy. Existing literature suggests that the decision-making process and strategies regarding land use management are rich with power imbalances that alienate public and Indigenous Nations' considerations (Smith & Bulkan, 2021; Booth & Halseth, 2011; Jackson & Curry, 2004).

While mountain bike tourism (generally travelling more than one-hundred kilometers for the purpose of riding a mountain bike) can be considered a sustainable tourism product

that provides economic benefits, it can also increase conflict between community stakeholders, and the act of mountain biking, specifically repeated bike traffic on trails, can negatively impact soils, vegetation, and wildlife (Ballantyne et al., 2014; C. Pickering et al., 2010). Sustainable tourism industries are measured by their ability to contribute to socio-cultural, environmental, and economic development in communities (Dodds, 2012; Elkington, 2013). The growth of mountain bike tourism is increasing the demand for access to diverse natural landscapes. In Squamish, BC, visitor spending increased from approximately \$9.9 million in 2016 to \$26 million in 2023 as per an impact report commissioned by the Squamish Off-Road Cycling Association (Larose, 2024). This shows the exponential growth and demand for mountain bike tourism. Consequently, heightened regulation, management, and the establishment of protected areas are necessary to reduce the environmental impacts of mountain biking and other recreational practices (Freeman & Thomlinson, 2014; C. M. Pickering & Barros, 2015). However, the creation of boundaries such as recreation sites, trails, parks, and protected areas can further displace Indigenous communities and reinforce colonial systems of land management or allocation (Cruikshank, 2005; Mason, 2014). Land use management in BC is dominated by natural resource extraction industries that have encouraged conflict, reduced collaboration, and fuelled complications in the legal application of Indigenous rights and title (Takeda, 2014). All of these conditions create the perfect storm pressuring land use management decisions at the provincial level in order to determine the viability of mountain bike tourism as a sustainable development option.

The inability to secure the necessities of life, such as secure access to food, housing, and work, are defining characteristics of livelihoods. A loss of livelihood, climate change events, and social inequalities are catalysts for transition within Indigenous and non-Indigenous rural communities. Rural areas are broadly defined by Statistics Canada (2016) as places with populations of less than 1,000 people, and can include small towns, villages, estate lots, undeveloped lands, remote and wilderness areas, and agricultural lands. For the purpose of this research, I adopt this definition but include any community listed in the BC rural practice subsidiary agreement, which encompasses more than 200 communities in the province based on specific ranking criteria (Government of British Columbia, 2022b). Indigenous Peoples in BC include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, with more than 200 distinct

First Nations located throughout the province. In this thesis, I use Indigenous communities to refer to the diversity of Indigenous Peoples living in the province and use specific Nation's in several instances. When referring to Indigenous communities' lands, I include lands or areas that are managed or owned by a First Nation, part or all of a First Nation Reserve (a parcel of land set aside by the Canadian Federal Government under the Indian Act for exclusive use and occupation of a particular First Nation Community), treaty land (parcels of land that are officially acknowledged as belonging to or being under the stewardship of Indigenous nations according to terms of a legally binding agreement in Canadian courts), or non-treaty land which an Indigenous community is actively managing (such as co-management or stewardship agreements to manage resources or areas of traditional use). This also includes any provincial land or private land that is managed by an Indigenous community, either public or private. Many Indigenous communities in BC are in rural regions. Numerous rural and Indigenous communities across the province already have, or are considering, mountain biking as a keystone tourism product (Government of British Columbia, 2021).

The World Tourism Organization (2018) identifies mountain biking as a growing global trend. The acknowledgment of mountain biking at this scope will undoubtedly heighten interest from a myriad of stakeholders in search of socio-economic and environmental benefits. According to the Northern BC Mountain Bike Recreation and Tourism Development Strategy (2014), communities who may experience a loss of livelihood, social inequality, and environmental degradation identify mountain bike tourism as their core tourism product opportunity to pivot their rural economies. While the ecological and economic impacts have previously been studied, it is critical to understand the socio-cultural and broader environmental implications of mountain bike tourism as a development tool (Knowles et al., 2024; Marion et al. 2016; Pickering & Barros, 2015; Quinn & Chernoff, 2010).

The key objective of this study is to examine the level of responsibility being exercised by mountain bike tourism developers to rural and Indigenous communities as they interact with land use policy, reinforce or disrupt colonial patterns of land use management, and use public and private lands. To do this, I use secondary literature on natural resource industries and semi-structured interviews with industry professionals to determine how the mountain bike tourism industry can be sustainably developed.

This research can assist mountain bike tourism developers, rural and Indigenous communities, policymakers, and tourism and land use planners with the creation of a more sustainable mountain bike tourism development strategy. The findings focus on a strategy that is better able to consider the history of land use management decisions and adapt to the dynamic socio-political and environmental conditions currently impacting the province. Although my thesis focuses on the sustainable development of the mountain bike tourism industry, it will provide a deeper understanding of the land management patterns, power relationships, and policy frameworks that influence development in rural and Indigenous communities.

## **Literature Review: Contextualizing the Socio-Economic Dynamics of Mountain Biking and Mountain Bike Tourism**

### *Mountain Biking and the Mountain Bike Tourism Industry in British Columbia*

Cycling BC, the provincial sport organization for mountain biking, defines mountain biking as:

The sport of riding off-road over rough terrain on bikes that underscore durability and performance in rough terrain: wide, knobby tires, large frame tubing, front fork or dual suspension shock absorbers. The durability factor means a far heavier bicycle weight-to-rider ratio. Mountain biking is broken down into four categories: cross-country, downhill, four-cross, and trials. This individual sport requires endurance, bike-handling skills, and self-reliance. Most mountain bikers ride off-road trails, whether country back roads, fire roads, or singletrack (narrow trails that wind through forests, mountains, deserts, or fields). (para. 1, n.d.)

While the Cycling BC classification is tied closely to sport, mountain biking is more commonly referred to as a recreational or even leisure pursuit and can be described as a form of active nature-based outdoor recreation that involves navigating uneven terrain on specially designed bicycles (Hall, 1992; Marion & Wimpey 2017; Taylor 2010). In tourism literature, it can be defined as a segment of adventure tourism that involves diverse riding styles and attracts enthusiasts to both urban and remote destinations (Kuklinski et al., 2024; Quinn & Chernoff, 2010; Weber, 2001). A additional categories and styles of mountain biking that have evolved with new emerging riding styles and technologies, including enduro, dirt-jumping, free-ride, all-mountain, and electric mountain biking, or e-biking, among others (Destination British Columbia, 2015). In general, mountain biking can be simplified to three

main types of riding trail, gravity, and freestyle. Gravity and freestyle riding occur at specifically designed bike parks or facilities, while trail riding focuses on riding utilizing a trail network. In this thesis, mountain bike tourism refers to trips more than one-hundred kilometers away from an individual's home where active or passive participation in any type of mountain bike category is the main purpose for travel (Destination British Columbia, 2015; Lamont, 2009).

The history of mountain biking in BC is understood to have begun as a leisure pursuit in the late 1980's with Nelson, Kamloops and North Vancouver being the primary locations of influence and is well documented in a movie chronicling the birthplaces of free-ride mountain biking throughout the province and how the landscape shaped the sport today (Hennessey, 2017). Nowadays, the province is home to the world's largest mountain bike festival, Crankworx, occurring in Whistler Bike Park the world's largest and trend setting bike park, located in Whistler, BC.

The development of mountain biking from a leisure pursuit to a high-profile sport results in an industry that creates numerous socio-economic and environmental expectations from diverse stakeholders (Pröbstl-Haider et al., 2017). Since the scope of these expectations is broad, there are numerous academic interests that examine the phenomenon of mountain bike tourism. Current research of mountain bike tourism in BC is severely limited and there are two distinct gaps: (1) understanding the complex power dynamics that form the traditional hierarchy of land management and; (2) understanding how land use decisions can constrain or enhance socio-cultural and environmental development of rural and Indigenous tourism economies. BC is an ideal setting for this research because it is the primary Canadian jurisdiction with a provincial mountain bike tourism marketing agency, a large proportion of land is unceded Indigenous territory, and it has experienced significant and recent threats to rural livelihoods (Krishnaswamy et al., 2012). Most existing research investigates the direct ecological impacts of mountain biking, but less examined are its social and economic aspects, and even less so does academic research explore mountain biking tourism (Marion & Wimpey, 2017; Neumann & Mason, 2019; Quinn & Chernoff, 2010; Reid-Hresko & Warren, 2021).

The mountain bike tourism industry in BC is also unique because it is one of the few destinations in the world that has an industry trade and marketing association, the Mountain

Bike Tourism Association (MBTA). The MTBA focuses on both marketing mountain bike tourism products, and research and advocacy for the development of the mountain bike tourism industry. Its goal is to have BC “recognized for its world-class sustainable trails and abundant mountain bike experiences that are supported by enthusiastic communities and resort operators offering high-quality services,” (Mountain Bike Tourism Association, 2024). The MBTA is the key advocate for the development of mountain bike tourism in BC.

Destination British Columbia produced a guideline document on how to develop, manage, and market the mountain bike tourism product in BC that provides definitions, an industry overview, and guidelines for development (2015). Socio-economic and environmental benefits are listed as the primary motivations for why communities should develop trails, infrastructure, and tour operators for mountain biking. This is consistent with the United Nations’ (UN) definition of sustainable tourism which is “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities” (UN Tourism, n.d., para 1). This is important as it shows alignment with global strategies related to sustainability and further supports the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially goal 8: decent work and economic growth, and 12: responsible consumption and production (United Nations, 2018). In the 1990s, socio-economic and environmental benefits were largely associated with corporate responsibility; the term was referred to as the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) derived from the objective of a business to ensure financial, social, and environmental commitments are met (Elkington, 2013). Overall, corporate businesses, development agencies, and communities are all aware that value extends beyond economic profit and that other opportunities can benefit stakeholders.

At the core of mountain biking – whether racing, events, festivals, guided tours, lessons, or rentals – is trail usage. Whether they are purpose-built for mountain bike tourism or are for more general recreation use and used by mountain bikers, trails are a resource and product that are inherent to mountain bike tourism (Taylor, 2010). Numerous reports have been published showcasing the value of trails, and especially trails for mountain bike tourism in BC where mountain bike trails are typically described as purpose-built routes with features such as corners, rollers, jumps for riding (Destination British Columbia, 2015; Lucas, 2019; Lucas et al., 2014; Norris Penny, 2011; Western Mountain Bike Tourism Association, 2016).

Common themes among these reports are that trails provide opportunities to enhance environmental awareness and economic diversity, improve health and physical well-being, and increase social awareness of heritage and cultures. Many of these studies appropriately contrast the value of trails and mountain bike tourism with recurrent themes of user conflict, environmental impact, and economic capacity. In order to appropriately explore the social impacts of mountain bike tourism development, I have explored relevant literature on user conflict in recreation and land use as it pertains to management and development.

Trails in BC are largely created and managed by community volunteer driven not-for-profit entities. These organizations are often described as Mountain Bike Associations, Trail Advocacy Groups, Trail Clubs, Trail Organizations, Trail Managers, or Trail Groups. Recreation Sites and Trails BC, BC Parks, and the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment are the entities responsible for managing various aspects of Crown land and apportion Partnership Agreements (PA) to the organizations or private entities to manage and maintain a myriad of trail and trail-related infrastructure (Government of British Columbia, 2022a). Throughout this research, I use the term “trail management organization” or “trail organization” to signify any type of not-for-profit or private entity that is undertaking the management, development, or maintenance of a trail or trail-related infrastructure. In 2006, the first policy authorizing mountain bike trail development on Crown land was approved and implemented with updates in 2013 providing formal authorization that acknowledged mountain bike trail development separate from other types of trails and related infrastructure (Ministry of Forests Lands and Natural Resources, 2013). Mountain biking now occurs throughout BC on a myriad of land, including private land, Crown land, parks and protected areas (such as BC Parks and National Parks or municipal parks), via various types of land authorization, permissions and agreements.

### *User Conflict*

User conflict is generally applied in many studies as a type of interpersonal conflict. Interpersonal conflict is when one person’s or group’s actions affect another person’s or group’s experience (Vaske et al., 2007). Interpersonal conflict can also be applied to the same type of user, meaning mountain bikers may experience user conflicts with other mountain bikers if there is a difference in skill, motivation, or a lack of suitable terrain to

disperse usage, or riding style (Taylor, 2010). This highlights the importance of developing and apportioning adequate resources to develop trails and infrastructure that are specifically constructed or managed for the intended audience (Hagen & Boyes, 2016). Otherwise, there is a risk that the trails and infrastructure will not be used appropriately or will lead to heightened levels of conflict (Chiu & Kriwoken, 2003). To mitigate interpersonal conflict, the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) created the Rules of the Trail as a guiding code of conduct for mountain bikers (IMBA Canada, 2019). This includes the rule “yield appropriately” which speaks to the importance of mitigating user conflict (IMBA, 2019, para. 5).

User conflict is not restricted to interpersonal conflict between two individuals but can exist anytime there is a difference in social values. This extends beyond two individuals to social groups (Vaske et al., 2007). Often this type of social value conflict can be based in an underlying power imbalance. As mountain bike tourism grows through the creation of formal (associations, clubs, businesses) and informal (online communities, riding groups) groups, the amount of lobbying, advocacy, and stewardship influence will also correspondingly grow (Hardiman & Burgin, 2013). The underlying power imbalance in this context is between recreational users, such as mountain bikers, and larger, more established land users, such as mining, logging, and other resource extraction industries. Another power imbalance that also exists is between recreational users that participate in different activities, for example, hikers vs. mountain bikers or tourists vs. locals. Power imbalances lead to conflict that can exist both on the physical trail and as a larger land management issue beyond the trail.

In BC, the management of recreational land and trails are typically executed via a Partnership Agreement. These agreements are administered by the government agency Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC) under the *Forest and Ranges Practices Act (FRPA)* (Forest and Range Practices Act, 2002) with non-government organizations, such as trail organizations like the Columbia Valley Cycling Society or Shuswap Trails Alliance, private entities, or First Nations. The majority of legally established trail networks in the province are managed under Partnership Agreements held by not-for-profit mountain bike trail associations or mountain bike tourism operators. Partnership Agreements that are issued to special interest groups, such as mountain bike clubs, can increase user conflicts by excluding

other stakeholders, such as Indigenous communities (Hale & Belanger, 2015; Hardiman & Burgin, 2013). However, there remains a gap in the literature on Indigenous involvement pertaining to mountain bike tourism and outdoor recreation development as a whole (Lucas, 2015). Another gap related to user conflict in mountain bike tourism development is understanding the pressures created by mountain bike tourism operators on rural infrastructure (Poltimäe et al., 2022; Winter et al., 2020).

When users of the same resource such as a trail, recreation site, or network have a conflict, it is typically mitigated through educational awareness, signage, limiting usage (separation of users), developing additional trails/sites, creating user-specific trails/sites, increasing communication, or complying and enforcing rules and regulations (Alleyne, 2008; Jackson & Wong, 2018; Koemle & Morawetz, 2016; Marion et al., 2016; Marion & Wimpey, 2017; Newsome et al., 2016; Roskowski, 2008; Spence, 2007; Tumes, 2007; Vaske et al., 2007). User separation is documented as one of the most effective strategies in mitigating conflict (Marion & Wimpey, 2017; Parks Canada, 2010). This can be correlated with the development of more extensive recreation sites and trails to disperse users and provide a more targeted experience in line with the users' social values. Common user separation tactics within trail networks are based on the direction of travel, motorized or non-motorized, type of activity (horseback riding, hiking, mountain biking), commercial use, or public use. Separating users presents an interesting duality because it necessarily increases the number of recreation sites needed to accommodate different uses. It also creates an inherent degradation of the environment due to the disturbance of soils, vegetation, wildlife, and habitat by the additional construction of trails (Ballantyne et al., 2014; C. Pickering et al., 2010). Conversely, increasing the number of trails and recreation sites throughout the province is identified as a key development strategy in order to provide a more diverse product-experience for mountain bike riders, reduce tourism seasonality (by utilizing the different climate zones of the province at different times of the year), and encourage sport tourism, which may also increase stress on trail organizations who maintain them (Dornik et al., 2018; Getz & McConnell, 2011; Hagen & Boyes, 2016).

### *Climate Change*

Research shows that direct impacts from climate change, such as forest fires and flooding, are changing the behaviors of tourists by shifting their motivations to travel, limiting seasonal opportunities, and decreasing access to recreational sites (Mason & Neumann, 2024; Scott et al., 2007). These same climate change outcomes, with the addition of insect infestations, are also increasing the rate at which natural resource extraction occurs in BC and is showcased by the government allowing logging industries to increase their extraction due to the mountain pine beetle infestation (Amelung et al., 2007; Nikiforuk, 2012). Limiting seasonal opportunities increases demand from tourists to access more remote and diverse landscapes for nature experiences. This brings users to more rural and isolated communities (Tumes, 2007). For rural and Indigenous communities, the effects of climate change may be heightened due to their remote locations and reliance on the natural environment for food security, preservation of cultures, and livelihoods (Krishnaswamy et al., 2012). However, social development can occur in these communities as a result of climate change events by solidifying the connection between environmental care and quality-of-life indicators or social justice issues (Miller et al., 2011). Rural and Indigenous communities that have experienced recent climate change events may have an increased interest to collaborate with government agencies and other stakeholders to support sustainable development (Drolet & Sampson, 2017). Consequently, climate change mitigation demands more effective land use regulation and management, and the establishment of parks and protected areas to reduce environmental impacts (Freeman & Thomlinson, 2014; C. M. Pickering & Barros, 2015). An opportunity for further research exists to examine how mountain bike guides, tours, and events compound the effects of climate change throughout the land base, especially in parks and protected areas in BC.

### *Land Use Management*

Mountain bike tourism is an industry based on using trails, whether they are specifically designed for mountain biking, or adapted from other existing trails. In BC, land management is represented primarily by three owner-groups: the provincial government (94%), primarily through the Ministry of Forest Land, Natural Resources Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD) and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change

Strategy (ENV); private ownership (5%); and, the federal government (1%) (Province of British Columbia, 2017). A previous branch of FLNRORD, now a branch of ENV, Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC) is the agency responsible for administering and managing recreational spaces and trails outside of provincial parks, commonly referred to as Crown Land. Both FLNRORD and RSTBC operate primarily under the provincial legislation, *FRPA* (2002). The other important piece of land management legislation is the *Land Act* (Land Act, 1996). Within the *Land Act* (1996) is a specific policy to address tourism businesses, known as the Adventure Tourism Policy (AT Policy), which regulates commercial use of Crown land (land owned by the federal or provincial governments), including established and non-established recreation sites and trails (Adventure Tourism Policy, 2013). To be clear, the AT Policy is a land use management policy that governs permission and access to adventure tourism businesses, such as mountain bike tourism commercial operators, on Crown land. There is currently very little literature that identifies how much influence adventure tourism businesses have on policy, and how the industry navigates legal processes to establish their interest on the land.

Land use decision-making abilities in BC are often allocated to organized groups with significant influence. This usually involves a Partnership Agreement or other arrangement with a provincial ministry that permits them to manage trails and other infrastructure on behalf of a land manager or owner. The Harshaw et al. (2006) study found that mountain bikers considered themselves well represented in forest land use planning because of their ability to become organized via local trail clubs, which are advocacy groups. Advocacy groups create a unique power dynamic in land use management due to the inherent value of their social license (Harshaw et al., 2006). This highlights another opportunity for further research to understand how mountain bike tourism operators engage, and consult with, local stakeholders to ensure that negative impacts on the public are prevented, controlled, or mitigated.

Social license is a term that was coined by Canadian mining executive, Jim Cooney, in the late 1990s. It has become a key tool that private and governmental organizations need to develop to reduce litigation and mistrust from host communities (Cooney, 2017; Hale & Belanger, 2015). Social license is also referred to as social acceptance and represents a pivotal shift in BC's land use planning philosophy. Jackson and Curry (2004) explored the

heritage of competing interests between public and private interests in BC's land use planning and highlighted the institutional challenges to bureaucracy from 1956 to 1978. This is an important era for modern land use planning for two main reasons: 1) it established forestry as a key economic driver; and 2) it led to the creation of the *Forestry Act* (1996). The *Forestry Act* (1996) is significant because it was the first act to recognize recreation as a value on the land. This formally made the management of recreational pursuits a duty of the Ministry of Forests, although at the time it was categorized as a non-resource value (Sloan, 1945).

Some researchers have defined four main eras in the province's land management history: 1) the integrated resource management era (1956-1978); 2) the sympathetic management era (1978-1991), known for the relaxation of environmental constraints on forest companies and increased conflict with Indigenous and environmentalist communities; 3) the participatory approach to resource management era (1991-2010); and 4) the democratization or co-management of resource management era (2011-2020) (Jackson & Curry, 2004). With the introduction of the idea of social license in land management, participatory and collaborative processes have evolved over the last three decades. The participatory approach era in the 1990s marks the start of the provincial government's efforts to better integrate ideals of sustainable development in land-use planning that helped establish the democratization of resource management. Highlighting the different eras of land management is necessary as it mirrors the establishment of the adventure tourism industry and key legal decisions related to Indigenous rights and title.

Adventure tourism industries have a long history of operation in Western Canada starting with mountaineering in the 1890s in Banff National Park and the modern adventure tourism era starting in the 1940s with helicopter skiing (Spaar, 2010). Both industries required extensive use of vast areas of land in BC and operated in remote areas that have ecological importance and high-value natural resources. Mason (2014) describes how the establishment of parks and protected areas in the Banff-Bow Valley were created to help a burgeoning tourism industry and conversely how the establishment of these land boundaries further displaced and assimilated the Indigenous communities of the area. Cruikshank (2005) also emphasizes how the establishment of boundaries, borders, and the apportionment of resources reinforce colonialism and displace Indigenous Peoples in BC, the Yukon Territory

and the State of Alaska. She describes the paradigm of land management from an Indigenous perspective and discusses Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), which can shift power between governments and Indigenous communities, as it considers Indigenous knowledge regarding sustainable use of local resources. Cruickshank (2005), Mason (2014), and Youdelis (2016) emphasize how a lack of integration of TEK and Indigenous Peoples' perspectives in government land use management processes, negotiations, and consultation has limited their power to make decisions about Indigenous ancestral territories.

The AT Policy allows permits under the *Land Act* (1996) for adventure tourism operators to access Crown land to run their commercial business, and permission is granted in the form of a tenure. This process requires the operator to consult and engage with local stakeholders (FLNRO, 2013). It is important to note that the duty to consult with Indigenous stakeholders is that of the provincial government (FLNRO, 2013). Meanwhile, the provincial tourism marketing organization (MBTA) recommends that mountain bike tourism operators engage with communities based on the shared values of economic benefit, social impact, and environmental responsibility (Destination British Columbia, 2015). One of the greatest challenges identified by businesses is the consultation and accommodation of Indigenous assertion of rights and title due to the demand by businesses to access Indigenous territory to provide tourism experiences (Asch, 2014). Therefore, it can be posited that the Adventure Tourism policy process for granting permission to access land for mountain bike tourism can sidestep or enhance government and industry relations with Indigenous governments and their communities.

The conflict between tourism and forestry is an important discussion because they often hold an interest in the same land and exist under the direction of the *Land Act* (2006) (Gooch, 2013). However, permission to develop trails and recreation sites under the *FRPA* (2002) creates a power differential by reinforcing the preferential interest of the forestry industry. As a result, adventure tourism operators are calling for more tenure security regarding their interests (Heidt, 2006). Takeda (2014) thoroughly examines tenure security and power dynamics from the context of forestry and explores how granting access to the land can complicate the assertion of Indigenous rights and title. Yet, Takeda explains how co-management and decolonial democratization of land use planning may have the ability to alleviate power imbalances created by the historic hierarchy of land management in the

province. This is largely proven throughout court decisions clarifying Indigenous rights and titles (*Calder et al. v Attorney-General of British Columbia*, [1973] SCR 313, 1973 CanLII 4, 1973; *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, 1997; *Haida Nation v. British Columbia (Minister of Forests)*, 2004; *Ronald Edward Sparrow v. Her Majesty the Queen*, 1990; Supreme Court of Canada, 2004). An important case related to my thesis is *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia* (2014) because it states that the Crown must provide consultation to Indigenous Nations on behalf of other interest holders including tenure holders. Current research is focused on natural resource extraction industries, with very limited information available on how tourism land use decisions in BC's rural and Indigenous communities may differ. My research uses mountain bike tourism development in BC as a lens to better understand the complex power dynamics that form the colonial hierarchy of land management.

### **Methods and Methodological Approach**

I used a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach for this study as it supports a collaborative process between the researcher and participants and incorporates the participants into multiple aspects of the research process, and is commonly used in qualitative mountain bike studies (Neumann & Mason, 2019) due to its abilities to meet academic and participant needs (Daley et al., 2010; Israel et al. 2005). Due to my position within the mountain bike industry as an event organizer, tour operator, trail builder, project manager, and industry professional, this methodology allowed me to engage with the participants at a deeper level. It also helped me to develop a robust understanding of practical outcomes that communities and organizations can readily implement. CBPR is similar to other participatory research methodologies that aim to benefit from and extend existing knowledge at grassroots community levels. The research followed a CBPR framework, as outlined by (Israel et al., 2003):

1. Foster co-learning and capacity building. A balance between knowledge generation and benefits for community partners.
2. Focus on problems of local relevance.
3. Occur through a cyclical and iterative process.
4. Disseminate results to all partners and involve them in wider communication of results

5. Involve a long-term process and commitment to sustainability.

I chose a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach because it aligns with the collaborative and community-centered aims of my thesis on mountain bike tourism in rural and Indigenous communities. CBPR allowed me to engage meaningfully with participants by actively involving them at multiple stages of the research process, fostering a balance between generating knowledge and delivering tangible benefits for stakeholders. This methodology emphasizes local relevance, co-learning, and long-term sustainability, which is essential in examining the nuanced socio-economic, environmental, and cultural challenges in these communities.

By incorporating CBPR, I can more effectively address complex land use and tourism issues, as the iterative nature of this approach allows for continuous feedback and adaptation. This is crucial to support adaptive management practices and to address conflicts in land use—a core focus of my study. The CBPR framework also empowers participants to contribute their unique insights. This supports my aim to develop tourism practices that resonate with and are grounded in the experiences and needs of rural and Indigenous communities. Furthermore, it is similar to the participatory approach used for land use planning, which is a process many of the participants have experience with. This also provided useful insights into the challenges of modern land use planning processes.

I worked with local communities, businesses, and government to further define critical questions that represent their key concerns. Since there is very limited existing research on the responsibilities of mountain bike tourism operators, I considered more established secondary literature from adventure tourism industries such as the helicopter skiing industry, and land management studies from other countries such as Aotearoa New Zealand and the United States of America.

It is essential to address the influence of the predominant presence of Euro-Canadian males in leadership positions within the mountain bike tourism industry, particularly given that they comprised the majority of interview participants. This demographic dominance shapes the discourse and development trajectories within the sector, potentially privileging specific cultural and social perspectives while marginalizing others. The reliance on Euro-Canadian male voices reflects broader structural dynamics that often frame industry standards, priorities, and the allocation of resources. This underscores the need for critical

reflection on how power, identities, and cultural representations influence the industry's direction and impact, particularly as rural and Indigenous communities engage with mountain bike tourism as an avenue for development.

My research used qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key rural and Indigenous stakeholders who expressed interest in using mountain bike tourism as a form of development for their business or community. A snowball sampling technique, whereby interviewees were able to recommend other potential sources, was utilized to reach interview participants. (See Table 1 for a list of interview participants). The semi-structured nature of these interview allows for the interviewer to follow a flexible guide rather than a fixed, set-question list. This permitted the interviewee to go into great detail and provide rich context. While some may have moved on from their positions, all interviewees are referred to by their identities and roles at the time of interview. A total of twenty interviews, seventeen with men and three with women were conducted, ranging from one to three hours in length. Interview questions considered the *Land Act* (1996), *FRPA* (2002), AT Policy, current industry trends, climate change, and similar experiences in land use planning with resource extraction industries. The semi-structured approach allowed for the interviewee to engage with stakeholder topics that were of particular interest to them and gave them time for reflection, as themes of the interview guide were pre-circulated to participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

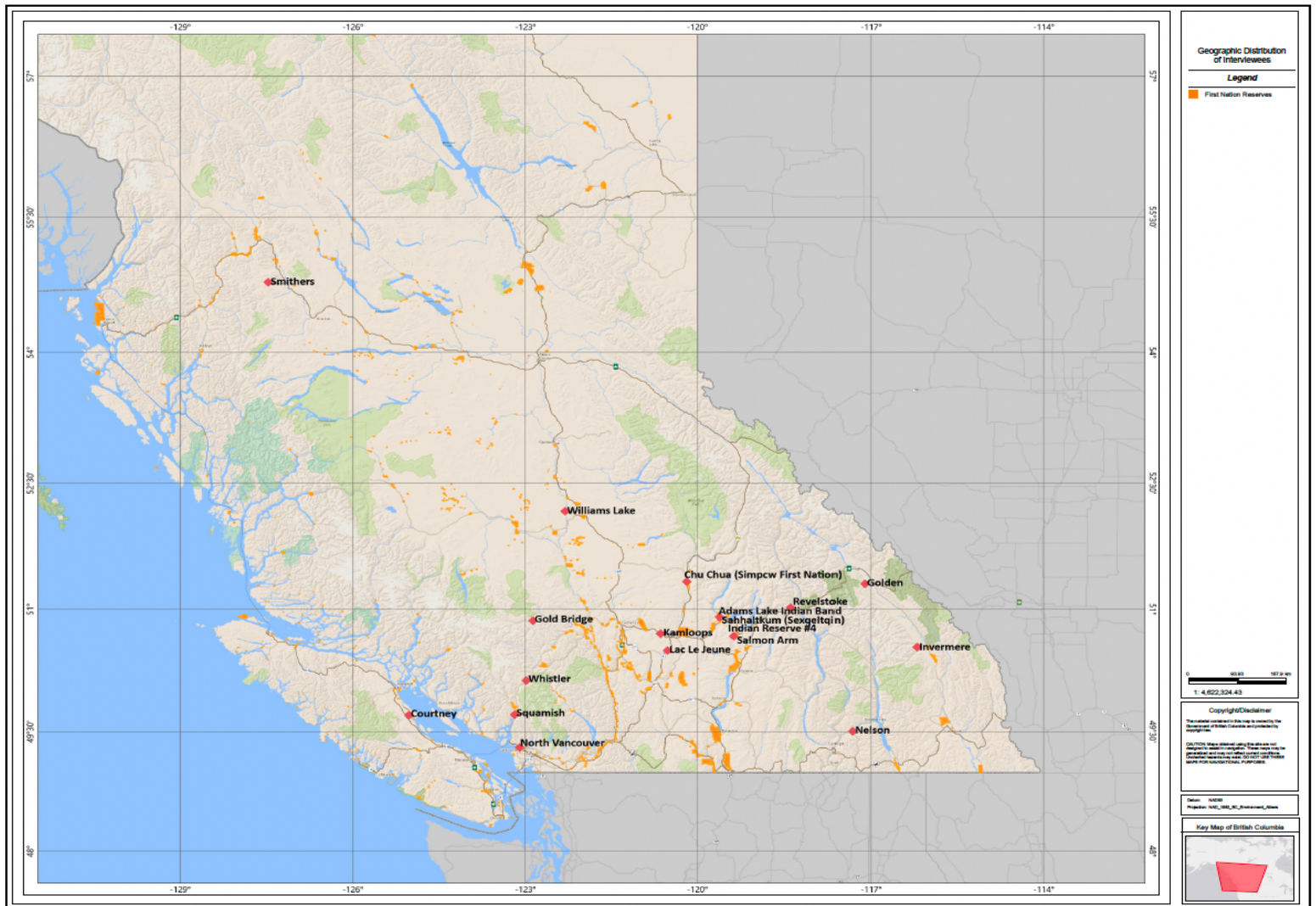
Verbatim interview transcriptions were provided to all interview participants upon request to allow for edits before final themes were established and to ensure the accuracy and reliability of their words. All interviewees are referred to by their identities at the time of interview. While all interviewees were offered anonymity, they chose to be associated with their opinions and their names. Consent for their names to be attached to the data and used in the study further validated the research findings and supported open collaboration and transparency. An ethics application was approved by the Thompson Rivers University Research Ethics for Human Subject Board (file number 102523).

Table 1. *List of Interview Participants*

<b>NAME</b>	<b>CLOSEST CITY/TOWN</b>	<b>POSITION &amp; ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>DATE OF INTERVIEW</b>
1. Cameron Ross	North Vancouver, BC	Trail Builder	December 8 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
2. Curtis Pawliuk	Valemount, BC	General Manager, Valemount and Area Recreation Development Association	December 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2020
3. Dale Douglas	Gold Bridge, BC	Owner/Operator, Tyax Adventures	November 9 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
4. David Gagnon	Golden, BC	Executive Director, Professional Mountain Bike Instructor Association Owner/Operator, Higher Ground Sports	October 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
5. Jim McGoverin	North Vancouver, BC	CEO, Yervana Inc.	November 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
6. Jordy Norris	Whistler, BC	Sales and Marketing Manager, Blackcomb Helicopters	December 9 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
7. Leanne Helkenberg	Smithers, BC	Director, Smithers Mountain Bike Association	December 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
8. Marcia Bennett	Revelstoke, BC	Recreation Officer, Recreation Sites and Trails BC	November 9 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
9. Martin Littlejohn	North Vancouver, BC	Executive Director, Mountain Bike Tourism Association BC, Western Canada Mount Bike Tourism Association	October 14 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
10. Matthew Trotter	Squamish, BC	Owner/Operator, Ride Hub	November 9 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
11. Mike Simpson	Kamloops, BC	Executive Director, Fraser Basin Council,	October 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
12. Patrick Lucas	Courtenay, BC	Founder, Indigenous Youth Mountain Bike Program Consultant, Land, Forest, People Consulting	November 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2020
13. Phil McIntyre-Paul	Salmon Arm, BC	Executive Director, Shuswap Trail Alliance	October 14 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
14. Shawn Lewis	Williams Lake, BC	President, Williams Lake Mountain Bike Club	October 19 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
15. Shelley Witzky	Sahhalkum (Sexqeltqin) Indian Reserve #4 (Chase, BC)	Councilor, Cstélnec (Adams Lake Indian Band)	December 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2020

16. Tennessee Trent	Nelson, BC	Trails Manager, Recreation Sites and Trails BC	December 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
17. Tom Eustache	Chu Chua, BC	Maintenance Person and Trail Manager, Simpcw First Nation	November 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
18. Tim Cole	Lac Le Jeune, BC	Registered Professional Forester, Lonely Mountain Consulting Co.	January 19 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
19. Thomas Schoen	Williams Lake, BC	CEO, First Journey Trails	November 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
20. TJ Neault	Invermere, BC	Director of Trail Development and Indigenous Relations, Columbia Valley Cycling Society	November 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2020

Map1. Geographic Distribution of Interviewees



## **Researcher Positionality**

As I am key figure in the mountain bike tourism industry in Western Canada, it is essential to situate myself within the context of this research to highlight how my background, experiences and beliefs shaped the study.

I was born in Mississauga, Ontario, where I grew up with the privilege of engaging in various sports, hobbies, and outdoor recreational activities. In my mid-twenties, I relocated to Kamloops, British Columbia, as an amenity migrant, drawn by the outdoor recreation opportunities. Following my diploma in Outdoor Adventure from Algonquin College, I pursued a Bachelor of Tourism Management at Thompson Rivers University. Today, I am an upper-middle-class male in my late thirties, with most of my adult life dedicated to mountain biking as a recreational pursuit and as a multi-disciplinary industry professional.

Professionally, I have raced mountain bikes internationally and have been instrumental in the growth of enduro mountain bike racing in Canada from its inception. I founded the Canadian Enduro League in 2016 and continue to serve as its managing director. Beyond racing, I have played an active role in various facets of the mountain bike tourism and outdoor recreation industry. My experiences range from creating mountain bike tourism products such as events, lessons, and tours, to managing a contentious helicopter-accessed trail through the provincial Partnership Agreement. Additionally, as a project management consultant specializing in mountain bike infrastructure, I have worked on numerous trail projects that involved grant writing, planning, design, contract administration, and construction, in collaboration with not-for-profit entities, private businesses, and governments.

Spanning many regions of BC, my career has given me the opportunity to engage with many of the communities featured in this study. Locally, I have served as Secretary and Executive Director for trail organizations in Kamloops. I have also completed a range of professional development courses, including training from the International Association of Public Participation, Canadian Accredited Insurance Brokers, and technical courses in trail design and construction. My past role as an instructor at Thompson Rivers University in courses related to outdoor adventure business, has allowed me to contribute to and engage with future industry leaders.

As someone embedded in the mountain bike tourism industry for over a decade, I am deeply aware of the value that trails and mountain biking provide, both personally and professionally. My professional successes and failures have instilled in me a sense of stewardship for the land, as well as a commitment to ensure that mountain biking brings positive benefits to the land and communities it impacts. These are also some of the motivations that underpin this study.

My ontological beliefs are grounded in the understanding that reality, particularly in the context of rural and Indigenous communities, is shaped by complex interactions between socio-economic, historical, and environmental factors. This leads me to approach my research with the assumption that mountain bike tourism cannot be studied in isolation, rather it should be viewed as part of a broader ecosystem influenced by these forces. My epistemological stance further reflects my belief that knowledge is co-constructed through social interactions, and that my own position within the industry influences how I understand and interpret the data.

I recognize that my industry insider status within the mountain biking community, coupled with my professional reputation, can serve as both a catalyst for meaningful engagement and, at times, a source of tension or barriers. While I am an insider to the mountain bike industry, I am often an outsider in the rural and Indigenous communities I engaged with. I navigated this dual positionality by leaning into both insider and outsider roles, through transparency, candidness and being reflexive in my engagements with these communities.

Understanding that my background and professional experiences may influence how I collect, interpret, and present the data, I employed strategies such as snowball sampling methods to mitigate potential biases related to whom I engaged with. I also acknowledge that my positionality is fluid, and evolved as the research progressed. I committed to remaining reflexive throughout the process, recognizing that my perspectives shifted as I encountered new insights.

My ability to build trust with interviewees is often grounded in shared values, such as a commitment and demonstrated action to improving sustainability in the mountain bike tourism industry, and active contributions to decolonization and reconciliation efforts. These shared values helped foster a sense of trust and openness among participants who align with

these goals. Throughout the research, I have been transparent about my roles and positionality, particularly in situations where it may not have been immediately clear to participants.

The findings in this study are primarily based on the perspectives of the research participants, but I acknowledge that my own ideas and experiences did surface throughout the research process. In such cases, I have invited participants to engage with and comment on these ideas, to ensure that the final findings reflect a collaborative approach.

## **Overview of Thesis**

The remainder of this thesis is divided into two distinct content chapters, followed by a concluding chapter. Chapter Two outlines the evolution of power relations that shaped natural resource development and land use management policy, framework, and strategies, through an examination of culture, economics, access, and conflict. This research is necessary to conceptualize the effects of transitioning economies on colonial built socio-cultural and environmental values. It is crucial to understand how mountain bike tourism development may constrain or enhance resiliency in these communities. Chapter Three examines the challenges and conflicts that mountain bike tourism, specifically trails as infrastructure and trail management, have on the environment and the host communities. The ways that land managers struggle with capacity while advocating for change in how land is managed is a focus. Both chapters emphasize the need to incorporate sustainable development practices into all layers of infrastructure development, stakeholder engagement, management strategies, and environmental stewardship. The conclusion chapter discusses how mountain bike tourism developers can shift the colonial system of land management through advocacy, social license, and corporate social responsibility. It also examines how current trends need to be scrutinized further to assess the cumulative effects of commodifying unceded territory. This chapter identifies future mountain bike tourism development challenges and opportunities for research.

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## **CHAPTER 2: RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFLICTS IN MOUNTAIN BIKING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

Natural resource development and land use management policies play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of many rural and Indigenous communities (McFarlane & Schabus, 2007). As communities evolve, so do the power relations that underpin these policies. These changes have the potential to influence a range of components including economic considerations, cultural practices, social fabric, and the environment. This chapter explores the multifaceted evolution of relationships that have molded natural resource development and land use management policies in British Columbia (BC), with a specific focus on their implications for mountain biking tourism and trails. The findings contribute valuable knowledge that aids in conceptualizing the essential values to diverse stakeholders involved in mountain biking tourism. By unraveling the historical tapestry of power relations and policy evolution and implementation, this research prepares communities and relevant entities for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in the sustainable development of their mountain bike tourism industry.

The results and discussion explore the intricate dynamics between culture, economics, land access, trail management, and the conflicts that arise within these contexts. These insights are drawn from semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders and land managers, including community members, industry professionals, tourism marketers, and commercial operators from various rural and Indigenous communities across British Columbia (BC) (See Table 1). These stakeholders and land managers provided valuable perspectives. They were chosen as they expressed interest in using mountain bike tourism as a potential avenue for socio-economic development and environmental sustainability. The depth and diversity of these interviews are enriched by the author's extensive experience in the mountain biking industry, encompassing roles such as trail builder, outdoor recreation infrastructure consultant, and commercial operator running events with quite a large adventure tourism tenure throughout various regions of BC.

The following themes arose from the discussion with participants and are explored in this chapter: 1) the colonialism and resource extraction that shape land use management; 2)

authorizing agents and interest groups; 3) amenity migrants and shifts in rural community's demographics, values and economies; 4) trail management; and 5) attitudes of entitlement. From these themes, participants assert that land management policy frameworks have been, and continue to be, grounded in colonial power relations, yet mountain bike tourism may be a catalyst for small advancements in reconciliation. Also, the sentiment of entitlement among mountain bikers is a significant driver of conflict in trail management and mountain bike tourism development. However, by recognizing and addressing this dynamic, there is potential for conflict to lead to an increase in collaborative and sustainable approaches to mountain bike tourism development.

This chapter is an exploration of the historical context and evolution of power relations that shape natural resource development and land use management policies and practices. It provides a crucial foundation for understanding the shifting attitudes and conflicts in mountain biking culture and tourism. These findings identify challenges and opportunities for sustainable development in communities by addressing the following critical questions: 1) what key historical power relationships influence the mountain bike tourism industry to adopt priorities that emphasize social-cultural and environmental wellness as well as economic benefits; 2) how does mountain bike tourism constrain or enhance government and resource industry relationships with rural and Indigenous communities; 3) and, what are the implications of this when establishing trails on public or unceded lands and in protected areas?

## **Historical Context of Land Use Management in BC**

### *Colonialism and Natural Resource Industries*

The province of BC is deeply entangled with a legacy of colonialism and resource extraction that is compounded by the imposition of Eurocentric values and governance systems (K. Campbell et al., 2003; Morton et al., 2012; Turner et al., 2013). These colonial policies and processes resulted in the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their lands and created a power imbalance that continue to influence land use management policies in BC. This is particularly evident in how land is valued for various purposes, including resource extraction, agriculture, and different types of tourism and recreation, which all

contribute to BC's economy. BC's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by primary resource industry is typically broken into five categories: Forestry and logging (\$1.7B), agriculture and fishing (\$3.4B), oil and gas (\$4.5B), mining (\$5.4B) and tourism (\$7.2B) (Destination British Columbia, 2022). Resource extraction, particularly forestry, oil and gas, and mining are historically significant industries in BC. The allocation of land for these industries has primarily been driven by the economic interests of stakeholders from outside the local community and the provincial government, in some cases this creates a transfer of power and responsibility of large areas of land from the local community to large-scale and often international companies (Braun, 1997). BC's exploitation of natural resources is rooted in historical power dynamics that have had a profound impact on the environment and Indigenous communities. This has often led to conflict (Hayter, 2003; Willow, 2016). The imposition of Eurocentric values and governance systems promoted resource-intensive land use practices that do not always align with the economic interests, environmental values, and sustainable practices of Indigenous communities. Shelley Witzky (December 7, 2020), councillor for Cstélnec (Adams Lake Indian Band [ALIB]), explains this imbalance and how it reinforces historical power dynamics and creates conflict:

I see the same thing in every industry, whether it's tourism, recreation, grassroots people on both sides arguing back and forth, where it's not really getting anywhere. But when those arguments come up, and we can articulate them at the leadership level to a government that is open to hearing what our concerns are, then there's some mitigation of that. But with resource extraction being the main Canadian gross domestic product, how do you stop that?

Tom Eustache (November 10, 2020), maintenance person and trail manager for the Simpcw First Nation, adds that:

Forestry is one of those groups that's the hardest group to work with. You can leave that in! Because they're like an old boy's club that's been rolling for how many years now? [...] And it's controlled by, I think, sometimes maybe out of country companies too. Like the tenures and stuff like that, so they [forestry companies] get all of these licenses, they hold them all. So, they control all that. And they don't have to come and ask us [to develop inside a tenure on our territory].

Understanding the historical context of land use management is essential to examine the emergence of not only mountain bike tourism, but also outdoor recreation as a whole. In addition to Indigenous communities, the provincial government's prioritization of land use

affects the operations of industries and sectors within industries differently. The interchangeable terms ‘company towns,’ ‘resource towns,’ and ‘planned communities’ are common across rural areas in BC. These terms highlight the historical and contemporary role that resource extraction play in establishing the place and economic orientation of a single industry (Halseth, 2005). Ultimately, these resource towns created the infrastructure necessary for amenity migrants to relocate to. Mountain biking as a form of outdoor recreation is a relatively new development when compared to other recreation pursuits like mountaineering, hiking, or skiing, and much newer compared to resource extraction industries. With 95% of land in BC being Crown land and under management of various provincial ministries, it is impacted by the same historical context and power dynamics. Dale Douglas (November 9, 2020), who owned and operated a multi-faceted mountain bike tourism company specializing in float-plane accessed trips near Gold Bridge, BC, a company town turned outdoor recreation paradise, highlights how this hierarchy within provincial ministries and industries impacted land use permits for his business:

It’s the Ministry of Forests that manages our tenures, but they don't give a shit about adventure tourism. They're loggers. So, there's nobody looking after the land base of British Columbia for adventure tourism or tourism in general. The Ministry of Tourism is a marketing arm...right? There are no teeth to the Ministry of Tourism. So, us as tourism and particularly adventure tourism, we've got to go and beg to the Ministry of Forests for something [regarding permits], or we have to go and beg the Ministry of Environment for something whereas there's nobody looking out for our needs. We’re secondary. So then if we're standing behind the miners, the forestry, the guide outfitting association, who is a well-entrenched operation, the Ranching and Cattlemen's Association, again, well entrenched...hundreds of years. And then the Ministry of Environment. We're at the bottom of the pile.

Tennessee Trent (December 4, 2020), Director of Trails for Recreation Sites and Trails BC, the provincial governing body responsible for developing and managing recreation networks, shares his experience of the challenges associated with balancing competing interests:

There's this sort of a perception of an innate right to access to all—I'll call them public lands—the Crown often calls them Crown lands, and First Nations definitely wouldn't call them that, but the rural lands. It does lead to challenges if you're trying to manage... I mean, in my world, I deal with this a lot, like this sort of conflict. And if you're trying to manage or if there's a long-term use of, I don't know, ski touring, or mountain biking, and all of a sudden people start sledding in there [a given area], or dirt biking in there [...] And at some point, we probably do need to say, “this is the predominant use, this is what we're managing for,” and then sort of prohibiting some uses there, too.

Both Douglas and Trent seem challenged with determining how land should be apportioned and managed. In BC, if you want to operate a commercial business or an organized event on Crown land, you must acquire a tenure, issued in the form of permits, licenses, or leases. A tenure essentially helps the provincial government control management of, and access to, the land and makes the tenure holder a registered interest on the land (RSTBC, 2013). Most adventure tourism operators, including mountain bike tour operators, will be given a non-exclusive license. Non-exclusivity is an important caveat however, as more tenures are issued for a finite number of trails and area. This can increase pressure on the land base and further constrain that land, resulting in semi-exclusivity for those who received tenures early on. The issuing of a tenure to adventure tourism operators for mountain biking is important because it creates a vested commercial interest on the land base, similar to that of a logging operation, a type of interest that may be viewed differently than a Partnership Agreement with the trail organization. Douglas and Trent are clearly questioning the process and policy that seems to favour historic commercial or industrial use of the lands and that are not agile enough to lean into the complex contemporary constraints.

While the land tenure process and policy plays catch up, Trent also illustrates how BC's colonial context still influences not only the provincial government's land management processes, but also the public's interactions with, and sense of, access to the land. There is currently a shift within the provincial government and other stakeholders to reconfigure land use management policies and decision-making to align with reconciliatory processes. Eustache (November 10, 2020) explains how these changes have changed the ways forestry companies interact with his community (Simpw First Nation):

But now they've [referring to industry] been sort of forced to come and ask us, "okay, can you guys do added blocks for us," so those people will go through what they have to [processes and policy] and pay us to do it. So now we're sort of getting a foot in, but it makes it way more difficult than the last couple of years [to get approval for the industry stakeholders].

As Eustache demonstrates, reconciliation efforts when baked into policy and process makes a difference to the communities, yet land management is still heavily influenced by the interests of powerful stakeholders, landowners, and tenure rights. These include companies in the natural resource industries, but also trail management organizations, mountain bike tourism operators, the broader tourism industry, and even just public recreationalists. Unfortunately, as shown, historical biases and colonial power dynamics continue to influence the province's decisions, and by extension, mountain bike tourism development. The dilemma of primary resource extraction industries prerogatives versus other industries, and their desire to access land for development, is not new. However, mountain biking's rapid growth and the subsequent boom in trail building as the primary tourist commodity, requires the government, as the largest landowner and permitting body, to rapidly adopt new land management policies, processes, and frameworks that fall in line with reconciliation. This can richly contribute to rural livelihoods and can support environmentally sustainable practices.

### *Authorizing Agencies and Interest Groups in Land Management*

Land management is further complicated by the public's interests and sense of innate right to access land as Trent describes above, especially when commercial or industrial uses are considered. Gooch (2013) examines the policy and legal conflicts between adventure tourism and forestry in BC. Gooch suggests that change is needed in how these industries relate to Crown land tenures. Both use and value the same land differently, where forestry "licensees focus on gaining value from the land by extracting wood fiber while adventure tourism operators focus instead on providing visitors with high-quality experiences in the spaces between the trees" (Gooch, 2013, p. 39). It is important to recognize that while mountain bike tourism does not "extract" in the same way forestry and other natural resource industries do, it can also be considered to have an extractive component. Mountain bike tourism can reshape land and extract value in ways that limit its use to other parties both

through the ways it displaces other users from the land and the physical trail construction processes. When considering BC's settler-colonial context, the roles that mountain biking plays in land management and the policies, public perceptions, and interest groups' practices around these issues, must be further examined.

Current mountain bike operational policies are limited and dated at the provincial level. May 2013 is the last time that the province issued their operational policy report, *Authorizing Recreational Mountain Bike Trails on Crown Land*, although an update is expected in 2024 (Ministry of Forests Lands and Natural Resources, 2013). The policy goals outlined in this document provide a framework for recreational mountain bike trail construction and activities that includes environmental, socio-economic, and land-use considerations. They appear to be framed to reduce conflict between user groups but may potentially position mountain biking trail development beneath previously established tenures or land interests. However, these policy goals have changed to reflect the political and socio-economic growth of the mountain bike industry throughout the province. This reflects observations from trail organizations, as Phil McIntyre-Paul (October 14, 2020), Executive Director for the Shuswap Trails Alliance (STA), explains:

Whereas maybe 15 years ago, the [logging] company probably would have been just dealing with a bunch of dirtbag riders who are going out and building illegal trails, but there was relatively little concern, because they're a small group that had relatively little power. So, they could ignore them, and if they got hurt out there, there was very little liability. But now you have formalized trails getting a lot of traffic and the demographic is not just a bunch of dirtbag riders, it's people between the ages of 25 and 65 who are making anywhere on average, \$100,000, \$150,000 a year. They have money. And that brings greater reliability, and they're also extremely well organized.

If the forest companies are like, "well, we don't want to do this anymore," they [the Trail Organization] are going to be like, "well, we still want to do it, and we have lawyers who are part of our board [of directors], so we're going to fight you on this." And they [the trail organizations] have. They're better at PR, and they're better at bringing in the [...] community around this. So, the forestry companies are having to change their tactics, they're a lot of bluster. But they can't just snap their fingers and push people out of the forest anymore, because there's a lot more political power behind it than there was.

McIntyre-Paul describes an important factor to the policy influence in BC; the demographic shift of mountain bikers from "dirtbag riders", referring to core riders who were

disorganized and generally were part of a counterculture solely focused on the experience of riding, to more of a responsible, professional advocacy group with significant socio-economic standing in the eyes of the province and the public. This has important implications for land management decisions and policies. It is clear that competition amongst industries for access and control of lands still exists. For policymakers within BC's colonial context, provincial decision-makers view land, especially in rural areas, as a commodity for the benefit of the provincial economy (Halseth, 2005). This can create conflict in rural and Indigenous communities as many First Nations have different values and worldviews associated with the land that do not include commodification or ownership (Atleo & Boron, 2022).

Some regional trail organizations have attempted to understand and break down socio-economic and colonial power dynamics to engage more meaningfully with First Nation governments within and outside of the provinces' policy frameworks. Over the past 15 years, McIntyre-Paul has worked to position the STA as a leader on what meaningful engagement as a trail organization looks like for many mountain bike tourism developers. Although this process has not occurred without mistakes. He raises concerns about the current political climate surrounding the authorization of trails and land management in BC and highlights the current hierarchical system that includes authorizing agencies, like the provincial government's Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC), and other interest groups:

For large swaths of the province, the mountain bike community is way too used to being wedded to recreation sites and trails and are really used to operating in that environment. You put in your little plan [to RSTBC] they send it off for referral, maybe the [First Nation] band answers, maybe they don't, we all go build a trail, yay. But that process is going to break down and Rec Sites and Trails [RSTBC] are in for a reckoning in terms of how they operate, and you get your regional district recreation officers who try to operate their areas, like their little fiefdoms. And they just don't have that type of power anymore. And I'm often telling the mountain bike community, go to the First Nation, don't make your first stop rec sites and trails, go to the First Nation, work with the First Nation, develop your agreements with them, where they want to see trails, you get them on board, everybody else is going to fall behind and rec sites and trails is going to be like the last one trying to catch up. (McIntyre-Paul, October 14, 2020)

He questions the sustainability of the province's land permitting process and encourages interest groups, partnership agreement holders, and trail organizations to engage

directly with First Nations and circumnavigate the provincial process if needed. This shift in approach recognizes the evolving dynamics of land management and how mountain biking and its product of trails and trail development are contributing to a larger shift in land use management to a more community-centric and even reconciliatory approach. McIntyre-Paul (October 14, 2020) adds that although they have worked to build relationships with local First Nations and go directly to them during permit applications, this process is:

still not perfect, and it's still changing all the time, because bands [First Nation governments] are changing, and the relationships are changing locally. But it's at least an attempt to go right. We've caught that. So that's an example of I mean, I'd like to think that that was a moment where we're trying to decolonize the system a bit, but we didn't dismantle the system, it's still there and it's interesting, when the drawing came back to try and represent it from the [provincial] government side. They showed all of their system at the top here and then the dotted line and at the bottom where it was very heavy and oppressive is kind of what we're doing at a local level right which I understand it, right? They're saying grassroots and that.

In contrast to this bottom-up approach, Marcia Bennett (November 9, 2020), a Recreation Officer for RSTBC in Revelstoke, suggests that interest groups, like mountain bike trail organizations, that have a high-level of capacity and resources to maintain trails and sign partnership agreements with RSTBC are more likely to receive the province's support for development:

Mountain bikers get everything now. That's the argument that I get from the other user groups. And the answer to that question is what I mentioned earlier, the mountain bikers are probably the most organized, sophisticated, and I don't know which good word I can use to describe the mountain biking groups. But it's not that they get everything. It's that they know how to get everything. They figured it out. They're asking for money, their plans are organized. They're responding to everything that's been asked of them. So, I wouldn't say it's that they get everything. It's that they know how to, and they realize that that's the way to get everything. They figured out how to do that. So now we see other groups going well, you can't support them and not us and why don't we get these things? So, we're basically turning it around to those groups and saying, okay, well you can form a non-profit society. Are you willing to sign a partnership agreement to maintain this trail? Are you willing to do this paperwork? Are you willing to go after and apply for this funding? And usually, they aren't, or they can't.

This suggests that the province's existing policy systems favour organized and proactive interest groups that have a lot of capacity, resources, and public backing, which potentially

reinforces certain land management power dynamics and values of land developers (Ekers, 2018). Bennett highlights that the success of trail organizations lies in their ability to navigate the bureaucratic framework effectively. This mirrors the resource extraction industry, where those with the ability to assert their power can influence development and decision making for their benefit.

Other interview participants indicate how the provinces' overarching legislative framework still ultimately constraints collaborative decision making. When asked about how industries influence how landowners and policy makers prioritize land use planning and management, Mike Simpson (October 20, 2020), Director of Interior Regional Programs for the Fraser Basin Council, a non-profit dedicated to advancing sustainability in BC, said that:

we're in an era where there's a willingness and an intent to collaborate with different values and different groups on the landscape. But we're still legislatively in a model of the Forest and Range Practices Act, which is results based, and that was set up in the early 2000s when the Liberal government came in and replaced the Forest Practices code. [...]

Comparing Simpson's response to the experiences of Bennett and McIntyre-Paul reveals a lack of clarity and consistency on how policies are applied, which can put a lot of power into one user group's control if they have the capacity to navigate the policy framework. This reiterates Braun's (1997) long standing argument that "the fate of the forest has been convened in precisely the binary logic (jobs vs. environment) that authorizes certain voices while marginalizing others." (p. 5). There is a distinct contrast between the policies that govern authorizing agencies and the interest groups navigating these processes and frameworks. Bennett and McIntyre-Paul highlight that trail organizations significantly influence BC's land management, as they play crucial roles in either upholding or challenging colonial power dynamics, values, and policies. However, it remains uncertain which direction will ultimately prevail.

Part 1 of this chapter examined how a variety of participants view and interact with BC's historical context and land management policy landscape. Better understanding these dynamics and how they shape current economies and land management in rural areas is vital as many of these communities look to transition and diversify their economies. Many rural communities in BC are specifically moving away from natural resource extraction towards a more collaborative approach to land management and economic systems that includes the

priorities of diverse parties. Further, it is important to recognize the paradigm shift in mountain bike tourism and trail network management towards an increase of Indigenous representation within operational policy and procedures. These have the potential to embed decolonization and reconciliation practices. The next part of Chapter 2 examines the evolution of recreationalists and tourism products to better understand how conflicts may impact sustainable development in rural and Indigenous communities.

### **Understanding Conflict: the evolution of recreationalists and tourism products**

#### *Amenity Migrants and Social Conflict*

In their 2021 Review of the Provincial Trails Strategy, the Provincial Trails Advisory Board (PTAB) defines amenity migration as the movement of individuals to areas they perceive as possessing superior natural environments or distinctive cultural attributes, with the expectation of an enhanced quality of life (PTAB, 2021). This phenomenon was accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic:

If you talk about amenity migration, and people moving to communities because of those natural amenities, mountain bike trails are maybe the single biggest one. I'm obviously biased. I like riding mountain bikes. (Trent, December 4, 2020)

In the context of tourism, particularly outdoor and adventure tourism, the term amenity migrant is frequently used to describe individuals seeking greater access to outdoor recreational opportunities, originally the term applied to the movement of individuals to rural areas driven by the desire for natural and cultural amenities (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; Moss 1987). This phenomenon is prevalent in mountain resorts and rural communities, where people often relocate from urban environments in pursuit of a lifestyle centered around outdoor activities. Trent (December 4, 2020), thinks that amenity migration drives trail development and can help diversify economies, ideas and riders.

I look around the province and like at UBCM [Union of BC Municipalities], last fall there were three communities that came to our minister and said, we need mountain bike trail networks, we need you and your staff to help us get this built, because they are helping to diversify this economy. And it's more about economics, but that diversification brings different people, different ideas, and sort of increases that diversity and inclusivity, I think.

Research indicates that this influx of amenity migrants can strain local infrastructure, elevate the cost of living, and potentially engender conflict between long-standing residents and new arrivals (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011). Furthermore, this migration can contribute to the gentrification of rural areas (Özden-Schilling, 2019). As community economies evolve and the baby boomer generation diminishes, the demographic shift towards a younger, more amenity migrant-prevalent population can challenge the existing social and economic structures of these communities. This demographic and cultural shift raises important questions about the potential for mountain bike tourism and trail development to generate conflict and alter the cultural fabric of a community. Patrick Lucas (November 2, 2020), a Registered Professional Planner and Founder and Director of the Indigenous Youth Mountain Program, provides a compelling first-hand account of these dynamics within his own community of Cumberland, BC:

There's a lot of people moving here for the trails...like me, I'm an amenity migrant basically, which is a whole other issue. And I think I saw the numbers, something like 300,000 people ride the trails there, so they're getting very, very, very substantial amounts of visits, and the feel of the town is changing drastically. And I think for a lot of the local people who've been there for a very long time, the town is now going to go through a bit of a growth change, where a lot of those people who were like the early adopters and who created the thing, who played a critical role in creating what became so desirable for so many people, they're going to either get pushed out, or they're going to move out. And a different wave of people is going to come in who are more prepared and can either afford to live there or see the new way the community is something that's attractive to them. And I mean, that's good, it's bad. You can look at it anyway without getting into value judgments. That's just the reality of it. Your question is, how do we change that? Maybe it's...how do we not do it, it's like my answer would be...we don't. Communities that go through those changes and that growth.

Lucas expresses that this socio-cultural evolution is natural and emphasises that there is a changing demographic of those that were once responsible (whether self-appointed or otherwise) for managing trails. It is here that the importance of the amenity migrant's role in

conflict emerges, as the socio-economic culture shifts the community desires. Wahl and Parker's (2022) examination of how residents and amenity migrants in the village of Cumberland created and maintain access of private lands for recreation and tourism echoes Lucas's thoughts and underscores how amenity migrants may contribute to the disruption of colonial systems.

The complexities of amenity migration, particularly in rural and Indigenous communities, underscore the delicate balance between economic development and existing cultural realities or fabrics. As mountain bike tourism accelerates this migration, it not only reshapes the physical and social landscape of a community but also brings broader socio-economic implications. The influx of wealthier, often more liberal, and predominantly Eurocentric amenity migrants introduces a new demographic that can enhance economic diversity and bring fresh perspectives, yet at times, clash with the economies of rural communities, while also exacerbating existing inequalities and conflict (Williams et al., 2016). Conversely, amenity migrants may support reconciliation practices and have increased openness to learning about rural and Indigenous communities due to their limited experience within the host community and their ability to challenge local norms and values. The transition from resource extraction industries towards tourism recreation-based economies may reflect broader societal transitions. It is often accompanied by development that can alter the character and social fabric of these communities on a larger scale. The challenge lies in managing this shift in a sustainable manner that is prepared to mitigate the conflicts that can arise from socio-cultural and economic disparities, climate change, and the colonial system. Furthermore, Lucas's reflections on Cumberland reveal the paradox where the very factors that attract new residents, such as trails and outdoor amenities, risk displacing those who originally nurtured the infrastructure and created it. As communities grapple with these transitions, the role of amenity migrants becomes increasingly pivotal. How they integrate, contribute, and influence existing socio-economic dynamics will determine whether these communities can navigate their evolution in a way that honours their value systems while embracing trends that may reinforce or disrupt their way of life. The path forward requires a nuanced approach that anticipates and addresses the complex intersection of development, cultural identity, and environmental stewardship in the face of a rapidly changing world.

## *Trail Management*

The evolution of trail management has been significantly influenced by the growth in mountain biking, adventure tourism, and amenity migration. Due to the increase of users, trail management must now consider a broader range of skills and intentions, forever changing why and how trails are constructed (Taylor & Sand, 2021). Consequently, rapid growth of the mountain bike tourism industry has also shifted the dynamics of land use, pushing trail networks and how they are managed into the spotlight as vital infrastructure that must be managed with increasing complexity.

Whether for recreation, competition, tourism, or community development, trail user diversification brings with it challenges, particularly managing the varying skill levels and desired intentions of a wider demographic. One of the most notable changes has been land managers and trail builders now having to confront the liabilities associated with this diversity by shifting how trail networks are maintained and regulated (PTAB, 2021). The need to accommodate a broader user base often leads to the development of easier and more accessible trails, which, while inclusive, may not satisfy the desires of more experienced riders (Hagen & Boyes, 2016). This has sparked some digression and a returning trend of grassroots, unauthorized trail building as some mountain bikers seek experiences that are not available in the authorized networks (FLNRORD, 2018). Cameron Ross (December 8, 2020), a self-titled mountain bike trail builder who was caught and charged with unauthorized trail building in North Vancouver, explains why he builds unauthorized trails<sup>1</sup> and features:

[In North Vancouver] there are some really good legal trails, but they're all either very old or very tame, sort of thing. They don't really push you as somebody that's been riding since they're a very young kid...And so, they're not really built for the advanced rider, that's all. And that was the main push [to build unauthorized trails], we just wanted to ride some bigger features.

Authorized trail networks are designed and managed to be safer and more accessible with other amenities for the user. Unauthorized trails often do not have formal management and are designed and built for specific experiences of a select, dedicated and often highly skilled

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<sup>1</sup> Illegal trail building, rogue construction, unauthorized trails, unsanctioned trails, local trails, there are many names given to trails that are built without the explicit permission of the landowner or land manager. To simplify and contextualize the term 'unauthorized trail' encapsulates all of the above and mention of trails where permission to construct is not granted or the trail is not formally designated by the landowner as a trail.

user group. Eustache (November 10, 2020) explains how the Simpcw First Nation process of trail network authorization have created unintended consequences by displacing other users of the land:

One [conflict] we had before was when I put up no hunting signs, people said, “What? Now I can’t go up there and hunt now.” I said, “well, people are hiking up there and biking, I don't want somebody to get shot.” And it took a while for that to [be adopted]. [They’re] probably still thinking about now, it was probably two years ago now I put those signs up. And most people get it now. Like, I think the majority of people get it, but there are still people who wouldn't mind going up there to go hunting.

It appears that through collaboration it is possible to mitigate conflict, yet it requires joint effort to be able to amicably navigate the social, economic, and environmental factors at play.

Matthew Trotter (November 9, 2020), founder of RideHub, a mountain bike tour operator, bike shop, café, and rental company in Squamish, believes that commercial users of trails may also displace other users. He also believes that commercial use of trails creates tension in local communities as mountain bike tourism businesses are sometimes perceived as exploitative by using volunteer-built trails for commercial gain:

I would say there's a lot of passive aggressiveness [towards tourism businesses]. And that feedback is generally like “What are you doing? You're taking advantage of something that you didn't build, you didn't contribute to. What are you actually doing for the community?” [...] If I was to summarize the overall tone of the commentary, it's usually the idea that as a business, you've been very parasitic to the [trail] infrastructure, with no real understanding of whatever reciprocal arrangements in place to help or promote or push [trail development or management].

This sentiment underscores the broader social conflict between trail builders (whether an individual or a trail management organization/society) who build and maintain the infrastructure largely for public use, and the commercial operators who are now using these trails. Trotter (November 9, 2020) explains that the pride of ownership that trail builders feel can lead to resentment toward businesses or other commercial operations that profit from their work:

If I was to summarize the audience that was sharing that tone, I would probably say it's a lot of the historical trail builders. [...] People [trail builders] spend a huge portion of their lifetime and energy building this infrastructure. And whether they're building it legally or illegally, there is a tone or a sense of pride of ownership. And you as a business, not necessarily being the one who built all that stuff, but now you're using it rubs people the wrong way, 100%.

Moreover, the popularity of mountain biking as a recreational activity has led to conflicts not just between different user groups, but also within the mountain biking community itself. Unauthorized trail building, driven by a desire for more challenging and unique experiences, presents a significant challenge for land managers like Recreation Officer in Revelstoke BC, Marcia Bennett (November 9, 2020), who balance the needs of sustainable trail networks with the cultural and recreational desires of the mountain biking community at large. Her balancing efforts often lead her to take a dynamic management style that shifts depending on the conflict and constraints at each specific local trail network:

[At] Sunnyside [trail network], everything I do is going to be looked at in a microscope, I know that McPherson [trail network] has traditionally more licensee's [referring to tenure holders] watching over [to mitigate] conflict. And I know that at Boulder Mountain [trail network], we can kind of let a few things happen that no one's really going to have a problem with [as there are less constraints and overlap]. So yeah, I do, I manage different places differently, depending on what I know the issues are, and a little bit more flexibility and freedom [when there is one primary user group].

This level of direction requires a lot of collaboration, trust and time, but as Bennett alludes to, flexible management acts as one of the key contributors to trail network success across a community. This type of dynamic management is something that does require capacity and a willingness from the land manager.

Tourism marketing also plays a role in trail network management by curating the type of user and tourist experience. The downstream effect also impacts conflict and adds a layer of complexity to trail management. Ross (December 8, 2020) explains how the authorized trails that are more easily and readily available can be less desirable for serious mountain bike tourists and amenity migrants: "That's why they [tourists] come to the [North]shore, they're not coming to the [North]shore to ride Espresso [an intermediate flow trail comprised of smooth, less difficult riding terrain] or stuff like that, they come and ride The Dark Side." The Dark Side is one example of unauthorized trail networks within or adjacent to authorized

areas that have more challenging and technical trails. This dynamic underscores a significant point of contention: While authorized trails are developed with broader accessibility and safety in mind, they may not fulfill the desires of all users.

The cultural component of mountain biking, which appears to value challenging one's skills and a sense of exploration, will likely continue to drive unauthorized trail building and present an ongoing challenge for land managers (Campbell et al., 2021). What makes Ross's perspective so compelling is that he is one of the few unauthorized trail builders to receive a penalty and enforcement from a landowner for building unauthorized trails. This is a bit of an anomaly. Generally, there is a lack of enforcement capacity from landowners. Only 55 trails were authorized in the Sea-to-Sky corridor of BC between 2011 and 2018, that number does not reflect the actual increase in trails on the ground, where it is clear that the unauthorized trail building is vital to mountain bike tourism (FLNRORD, 2018). Without enforcement in the forms of fines or other consequence, unauthorized trail building will continue to impact the broader reputation of mountain bikers.

In conclusion, the rapid growth of the mountain bike tourism sector and amenity migrants seeking new experiences requires a dynamic approach to trail management, that reflects the broader socio-cultural shift within mountain biking. The resulting conflict, both within the mountain biking community and between different user groups, highlights the need for careful, collaborative management strategies that balance the complex interests of landowners, managers and users. As these dynamics continue to evolve, the challenge will be to manage trail networks in a way that respects the cultural, environmental, and economic complexities of the land and its users. Furthermore, the complexities of entitlement extend beyond interpersonal conflicts, as seen in the closure of unauthorized trails, a topic that brings to light the heightened tensions with Indigenous communities and the broader implications for land management, which will be explored in the following section.

### *Entitlement*

A recurring theme of entitlement emerged throughout research interviews. This word describes not only the attitude of individual riders, but also trail organizations, commercial operators, tourism marketers and recreationalists involved in mountain biking and trail development. Mountain biking and trail building or construction are symbiotic and form a relationship with the land that can breed entitlement and fuel conflict. Trotter (November 9, 2020), explains:

[In]mountain biking, you have to physically build [the trails]. So you've taken something that's natural and you've now put time, energy and effort into creating. You have personally put your own time into it. [...] I'm the one here, it's mine. I've [...] put my own energy and time into creating this thing.

Trotters' explanation reiterates a narrative of entitlement whereby those with an investment of time and effort to change the landscape have an inherent sense of ownership. TJ Neault, the Director of Trail Development and Indigenous Relations with the Columbia Valley Cycling Society (CVCS), expands Trotter's point and suggests that trail building contributes to mountain bikers exhibiting a higher degree of entitlement than users of other outdoor recreation activities. He notes that, "Every other [recreational] community calls us out. As mountain bikers, I think we certainly need to start recognizing that there is entitlement," (November 10, 2020). Neault (November 10, 2020) illuminates how conflict can be a result of mountain bikers' attitudes and senses of entitlement and posits that, "Our entitlement is actually destroying and eroding our power...and not by a little bit." Here he is referring to the closure of more than 40% of the CVCS's unauthorized trails and how it further exacerbated tensions within the mountain biking and outdoor community, including with ʔakisq̓nuk First Nation and other Ktunaxa First Nations whose ancestral territories the CVCS's trails are built on.

Interestingly, Neault's reference to the closure of unauthorized trails underscores the deep-rooted belief many mountain bikers hold, that it is their right to access trails in spite of their authorization status. During his interview, Neault discussed the CVCS application to the Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program (CERIP)—a government grant that can fund trail development—to develop more trails as a result of the closures. Trent, commented about the application stating:

I reviewed all the Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program applications for trails that came in, and I was looking for CVCS', because it was kind of a concern for us, right? If they were going to apply for a million dollars of trail development without authorization and with no support from the First Nation, if they were to win, that'd create a real issue, or a real challenging one. (December 4, 2020)

Authorizing trail construction or management might be the launching pad for entitlement, yet not all in the industry reinforce this narrative. Bennett is not naive, and wonders if every "proposal to build a trail automatically triggers a conflict, right?" (November 9, 2020). She further explained that not all conflict is negative, as conflict can lead to a better understanding of values and a more collaborative approach to land management. She suggests this is primarily because conflict helps to provide an entry point into deeper conversations that improve the social fabric of a community, and stresses that the social fabric is:

the most important determinant of a sustainable community, not even talking about mountain biking. And then in terms of what mountain biking can do for a community is to essentially bring the community together. So, getting people involved, meeting other people participating in some kind of cause related to mountain biking.

Thomas Schoen (November 10, 2020), CEO of First Journey Trails, a trail planning, consulting, and contracting company based out of Williams Lake, also takes a proactive approach to manage conflict and calls for the industry to re-evaluate their perspective.

I feel individual riders in general, like mountain bikers in general, are entitled personalities in many, many cases. I really struggled with this. [...] I just don't think this is how we can look at this, just because somebody built a trail 20 years ago, it doesn't mean that the builder or the club or the community who they built this for has any rights. There shouldn't be any entitlement. It should be a constant re-evaluation by all stakeholders.

He criticizes the insularity of trail organization culture and challenges the notion that past trail-building efforts confer ongoing rights actually baked into authorizations. Trent echoes these critiques and clarifies that although Partnership Agreements (PA) are granted to organizations to manage and maintain trail networks, there are no rights or actual interest on the land base that are bestowed via this agreement. Despite this, Trent cites an example from the Valemount and Area Recreational Development Association (VARDA), whereby their PA had an unintended consequence:

VARDA think they own the place up there. And we're trying to walk a bit of a fine line of empowering that, but also playing that role of sort of care and land manager. So it is tricky. And so do I see that affecting land management going forward? Probably, yeah. (December 4, 2020)

Curtis Pawliuk, General Manager of VARDA, explains that VARDA “was created because of conflict in the backcountry between user groups and they [the users] wanted to deal with it at a local level,” (December 1, 2020). Pawliuk explains that the original role of VARDA was to “keep the communication going and keep the peace”, and that it is not their goal to overstep landowners but rather an evolution of the values and desires from their diverse stakeholders.

Jordy Norris, Sales and Marketing Manager at Blackcomb Aviation, a heli-bike and multifaceted adventure tourism operator, highlights how commercial interests introduce further complexities to land use and recreation. As heli-biking becomes an emerging trend, Norris’s experience in securing a license of occupation tenure to operate on Crown land demonstrates how such advancements in technology increase access to more diverse and potentially sensitive landscapes. Neumann and Mason (2022) emphasize that these developments, while boosting backcountry tourism, raise important sustainability concerns regarding the ecological impact of expanding recreational activities in remote areas. Norris speaks to areas for improvement to increase collaboration and reduce conflict:

I would love to see the process be more inclusive of Indigenous response and ideas from the onset and have that be kind of more a part of the initial application process and mandating that these conversations happen in person. We've had a really positive outcome or positive experience by having these conversations in person directly with these groups versus somebody else who may not be as privy to those relationships and feel some sort of entitlement to this land. And I don't know if I would say that it further enforces the views of colonialism. But I would say that it doesn't respect the bigger look of incorporating everybody who is using that area, I think if the process was the Indigenous groups speak to the government simultaneously as one protocol versus speaking to the government, they'll then go to the Indigenous group and then come back and then tell you what to do, I think it'd be nicer for them. (December 9, 2020)

He points out a significant deficiency in the regulatory framework, where, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Indigenous communities may lack structured and recognized channels to express their concerns and priorities regarding land use decisions within BC's management systems.

It is clear from the interviews that mountain bikers have a high degree of affective responses related to all aspects of mountain biking. This includes a potentially elevated degree of effectiveness in the management, direction and authorization of mountain bike trail infrastructure and essentially mountain bike tourism development. Brown (2016) explains that moods, feelings and attitudes can all contribute to the affective economy related to trail management and if not in balance, this can lead to disengagement and further conflict. The repeated discussions of entitlement in interviews demonstrates that the affective economy surrounding mountain bike tourism is a constant pendulum that exposes different sides of the social fabric of rural communities. On one side, interviewees see reconciliation and community development as vital parts of trail networks, mountain bike tourism, and land use management, and on the other, the colonial parallels of the resource extraction industry that limit Indigenous Nations' decision-making authority or interests and assert ongoing colonial power systems.

While the affective economy around mountain biking can create divisiveness, it may also serve as a stimulant for engagement. For example, how communities that are impacted by climate change events are more likely to believe in environmental change and participate in climate action and support sustainable development (Drolet & Sampson, 2017). Eustache (November 10, 2020) is clear that when it comes to mountain biking:

all mountain bikers don't speak for us. The way I feel about it, is not generally how everybody else feels about it. I think a lot of groups take it for granted that they can go up there and just build anywhere they want or think they can just build anywhere. And not only just mountain biking groups, but also government groups, like the people that take care of that sector of mountain biking. They have to be educated on First Nations.

Given the popularity, emotion, and conflict within mountain biking in BC, it might be possible that mountain bikers occupy a more active position to engage, listen and contribute to social development in rural and Indigenous communities. Trent (December 4, 2020) believes that “mountain bikers are truly leaders on reconciliation and diversity,” and is hopeful that “by the time I retire, we're going to have seen a shift of power in land management from the ministry that I work for to First Nations.”

The sentiment of entitlement among mountain bikers and associated groups is a significant driver of conflict in trail management and mountain bike tourism development. This entitlement, rooted in the physical and emotional investment in trail building and colonial notions of ownership, creates power imbalances and challenges effective land management. However, by recognizing and addressing these dynamics, there is potential for conflict to lead to more collaborative and sustainable approaches to outdoor recreation and community development.

## **Conclusion**

Mountain bike tourism development is adding a layer of intricate and often conflicting dynamics for rural and Indigenous communities that seek to use it as a method of sustainable development. Central to the discussion from this chapter are the historical influences of colonialism, resource extraction, and land governance. These influences continue to underpin land management policies and frameworks that have traditionally prioritized economic exploitation over socio-cultural and environmental wellness. Consequently, they perpetuate power imbalances that if not consciously addressed, will continue to marginalize Indigenous peoples and create conflict in rural communities. Therefore, mountain bike tourism presents an opportunity – albeit a complex one – to advance reconciliation efforts and sustainable development.

The opportunity for mountain bike tourism to be a catalyst for small advancements lie within its ability to lean into conflict positively, reframe how it interacts with land use priorities, and connect with people and the environment. Trail management organizations, community champions, residents and tourism developers are actively fostering collaborative relationships between landowners and stakeholders. This offers capacity to challenge and gradually shift the colonial underpinnings in land management policies and process at all levels of decision making. Namely, when considering authorization of trails on unceded or public lands, and especially where the intersections of environmental protection, Indigenous rights and economic benefits are driving factors in favour of mountain biking.

The tourism industry possesses the potential to constrain or enhance government and resource industry relationships. All types of communities and mountain bike tourism operations may be the keystone to positively impacting these relationships. It is crucial for community developers and land managers to actively explore and grasp how community values evolve under the influence of mountain bike amenity migrants. This understanding will be key to preparing for trail management challenges as demographic changes unfold, particularly in light of the persistent sense of entitlement often observed within the mountain biking community. This entitlement, a driver of conflict, is often rooted in the perception of trails as public goods, which when left unchecked can exacerbate tensions between other land user groups and managers, especially when it comes to trail building in the backdrop of BC's settler-colonial context. To recognize and address the attitudes early in the land planning process, communities and land managers can use it as a tool for deeper collaboration. Such an approach would need to encourage an inclusive process, particularly with Indigenous communities. This could be aided by the affective economy in mountain bike tourism to ultimately realign the industry's priorities toward socio-economic and environmental wellness.

The historical power relationships that have shaped land use management continue to drive mountain bike tourism development. However, interviewees demonstrate that the industry is not blind to this and that there is a willingness, a call to action, and current progress for the industry to contribute to more equitable and sustainable communities. This will hinge on all stakeholders' abilities to navigate the cross-roads of colonialism, resource extraction, amenity migration, trail building and trail management. It is important that

mountain bike tourism does not reinforce the very power dynamics it seeks to transform. Rather, it should strive to be a vehicle for reconciliation, environmental stewardship, and community empowerment, especially in rural and Indigenous contexts.

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## CHAPTER 3: THE COMPLEXITIES OF LAND USE MANAGEMENT IN MOUNTAIN BIKE TOURISM

### Introduction

Mountain biking is the cornerstone of adventure tourism for BC and the demand for trails is surging. There are an estimated 40,000 kilometers of authorized trails on provincial crown land, and many of them are managed for volunteer run, not-for-profit societies, providing recreational access which many view as an inherent right (Provincial Trails Advisory Board, 2021). Trails are not merely the pathways for recreation, but integral to shaping the tourist experience, economies, and the land. As the trail infrastructure in BC grows, mountain bike tourism developers, including the not-for-profits managing the majority of the trails, are struggling to deal with the intensified pressures on the environment, communities, and land-managers. This is revealing deep-seated conflict and capacity gaps across mountain biking stakeholders that need to be addressed. It is essential to recognize that beyond the 40,000 kilometers of authorized trails, there are several thousand more kilometers of unauthorized trails, and that most of the trails traverse the unceded traditional territories of Indigenous peoples. Historically, Indigenous communities have been marginalized in land use decision-making processes, and mountain bike tourism presents both challenges and opportunities to shift this dynamic. The *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), provide a critical framework to ensure that Indigenous rights are respected. This chapter will explore how, in the context of mountain bike tourism development, Indigenous perspectives and knowledge are being called forward as integral elements to land use planning and trail development strategies. While mountain bike tourism encompasses more than just trail infrastructure, the focus in this chapter is on trails as the keystone for development. The discussion navigates the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of trail development, and emphasizes the need for adaptive management strategies within mountain bike tourism.

Trail sustainability and construction techniques are well understood across international recreation, tourism, and land management sectors. The International Mountain

Bike Association (IMBA) is a guiding organization for trail networks in Canada. Their assessment of trail sustainability includes three key aspects:

1. Environmental Sustainability — Will the trail provide for resource protection? This is the definition that is commonly used when referring to what does or does not provide for a sustainable trail.
2. Social Sustainability — How can trail development effectively meet desired user experiences? This is frequently overlooked in the trail development process. Evidence of the failure to meet desired user outcomes (experiences and associated benefits) are everywhere: overcrowded trails, trails with little use, trail users who feel “pushed out” by other users, and unauthorized routes.
3. Economic Sustainability — Can the land manager and the community bear the long-term costs of maintaining a trail? If it provides a valuable experience, it is likely worth the investment, but it must be weighed against shrinking maintenance budgets (IMBA Canada, 2019).

These components are foundational to this chapter’s practical approach to examine high-level management objectives of sustainability in trail development. These components closely parallel elements of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) framework and present a broader link to their sustainability criteria.

This chapter begins by briefly looking at the scale and scope of trail infrastructure in the province. It then looks at the pillars of mountain bike tourism development as defined by the mountain bike tourism association. Next, it explores how trail access and inventory issues influence the ability of communities and land managers to build and manage more trails. It highlights how unauthorized trail building is an issue and signals deeper conflicts within the mountain bike community. The next sections explore the high-level administrative issues related to trail development and access, including challenges and strategies for effective oversight and management of volunteer-based organizations that manage trails. Lastly, I examine the critical issue of capacity and how that impacts stakeholder engagement and adaptive management strategies.

Guided by Community-Based Participatory Research methodology, this chapter draws on twenty interviews with industry professionals. This chapter is also informed by a reflection on my own position as a commercial operator, consultant, and trail designer and developer. This offers a first-person perspective on the inner workings of the industry.

This chapter analyses contemporary challenges and innovative approaches and addresses the following key questions: 1) to what extent does mountain bike tourism contribute to the complexities of land use management?; 2) what are the trail access and inventory issues that influence the ability of communities and land managers to consider socio-cultural and environmental values?; and, 3) how are community and land managers challenged by trail development? The results indicate that there is a need to adopt a sustainable approach that respects the values of host communities, integrates Indigenous knowledge, and addresses pressing environmental and social impacts.

### *The Scale and Scope of Trails in BC*

The majority of trails in BC are managed through partnerships with user groups or recreational organizations (i.e. trail organizations or mountain bike clubs), land management agencies and in some instances, private entities. On provincial Crown land, generally BC Parks or Recreation Sites and Trails managed lands, a Partnership Agreement will be entered with a local user group or trail organization, passing on responsibility to the assigned entity management of the site or trail on behalf of the Crown. Of the 40,000 kilometers of authorized trails in BC, it is estimated via Trailforks (the world's largest online trail database), that there are an approximately 39,000 kilometers of mountain biking trails in BC. This number counts authorized and unauthorized trails collectively. The prevalence of trails in BC is largely due to the approximately 620,000 kilometers of Resource Roads<sup>2</sup> criss-crossing the province that provide recreation opportunities and access for trail development. The opportunity for increasing the trail inventory in BC is clearly not limited by a lack of

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<sup>2</sup> Resource Roads: Resource roads are typically one- or two-lane gravel roads built for industrial purposes to access natural resources in remote areas. Forest resource roads are used by the forest sector, and these roads are used across the natural resource and industrial sectors in addition to being and used for public access to wilderness areas and remote communities (Government of British Columbia, 2024).

terrain and access, and the province is actively accepting requests for proposals to form new partnerships (Government of British Columbia, 2022).

### *The Pillars of Mountain Bike Tourism Development*

In 2015, Destination British Columbia, the provincial destination marketing organization, created the *Mountain Bike Tourism Essential Guide to Developing, Managing, and Marketing Mountain Bike Tourism Product* in BC (2015). The guide explains how to assess trail networks and how to develop, manage, and market mountain bike products. Further, the guide highlights explored issues and challenges facing the development of the sector. Although outdated, this document is one of the few resources that aims to provide a guide to communities on how to assess and build their tourism product. It is also a fundamental resource that helps frame the logistics behind mountain bike tourism development. Mountain bike tourism can be considered a part of the experience economy, and further, an experience landscape, as the construction and development of trails alters the landscape. Trail construction is a unique process in which the builders, trail organizations, and land managers are often trying to cultivate an experience for the tourist, co-producing the experience through trail construction (Gibbs & Holloway, 2018). As trail infrastructure development changes the landscape, it can intensify or desensitize elements of the landscape, curating a tourist or local experience that impacts the sustainability of the surrounding ecosystems (Zajc & Berzelak, 2016).

Trail development and mountain bike tourism development share a unique relationship. Martin Littlejohn (October 14, 2020), the Executive Director of the Mountain Bike Tourism Association based heavily in BC, expands on Destinations BC's guide, and describes what his organization views as the pillars of mountain bike tourism development and how it relates to trail development:

There's a few...things that are necessary, to have a reasonable chance of being successful. And so that usually, of course, is a trail of organization to represent the users. There needs to be an active marketing organization in the community that also recognizes mountain biking as being an opportunity. And the land manager, also, obviously has to recognize the potential and it will only be sort of land being used for that purpose. So, you have those three elements and some of the supporting services to support tourism in general, then you're well on your way. And also, there has to be a source of funding as well, I guess, to initially kind of develop your trail system.

To summarize, the pillars to mountain bike tourism development are: (1) a trail organization to represent the users; (2) an active marketing organization; and, (3) a land manager who is in favour of mountain biking.

Trail organizations are an integral part of development, as they represent the users, and ultimately are the proponents looking to develop trails. Curtis Pawliuk (December 1, 2020) general manager of the Valemount and Area Recreation Development Association (VARDA) (a trail organization) describes why trail infrastructure development is important:

[Trail organizations] understand that tourism is really helping build the trail, the demand for the trail, the dollars for tourism-based infrastructure. They understand that it is developing or assisting to build the infrastructure for sure. The infrastructure just doesn't fall out of the sky. So there's got to be a reason to build it and an incentive to build it and support it.

As Pawliuk demonstrates, trail organizations understand a more holistic approach to development than just demand for trails, and that there is a symbiotic relationship between tourism and trail development. Although sometimes these organizations may have competing interests with mountain bike tourism operators, Pawliuk recognizes there is a willingness to collaborate for success for both parties.

When comparing Littlejohn's pillars against the IMBA criteria for trail sustainability, there are areas where both emphasize social sustainability, engagement and inclusivity of multiple parties, and the need to meet the-end user objectives as critical success factors. Littlejohn clearly emphasizes the importance of promoting the trails for more than just community use and advocates for managers to collaborate to make and shape the benefits to the host community. By structuring the pillars with such a Euro-Canadian perspective, with much of the decision-making power being held by interest groups, it seems to ignore the understanding that Indigenous peoples often have different thoughts and application of how they interact with the environment (Mason, 2014).

Freeman and Thomlinson (2014) documented the importance of community champions and political will as critical success factors for mountain bike tourism development. Host communities will have socio-economic benefits when rural communities and Indigenous communities are active in the land planning and management process.

The pillars of mountain bike tourism development described by Littlejohn (October 14, 2020) highlight the foundational elements necessary for successful mountain bike tourism: a strong trail organization, active marketing, and supportive land management. These components, as echoed by industry leaders like Littlejohn and Pawliuk, emphasize the interconnectedness of tourism, trail development, and community engagement. While these pillars provide a robust framework for development, they could be improved upon by considering the host communities' values and interests as a priority, aligning better with the IMBA criteria for sustainability to consider the long-term impacts. The pillars emphasize the Euro-Canadian perspective in decision making, and while the industry is working to transition to a more collaborative model with best practice guides like the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC's *Working in a Good Way* (2015), the current framework often overlooks Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, and approaches to land use and resource management. As discussed in Chapter 2, more collaborative and culturally sensitive approaches to land management and development may increase project timelines but could also help reduce additional layers of complexity regarding land management downstream. The next section looks deeper into the higher-level aspects of trail planning, development, and sustainability. It examines how these pillars transform from concepts into tangible projects that balance the complex interests of the proponents, and the critical role over oversight and management of the land.

### **Unauthorized Trails: A Symptom of a Larger Issue**

This section explores how unauthorized trails provide a barrier to authorized trail development and answers the critical question: what are the trail access and inventory issues in mountain bike tourism development that influence community and land managers ability to consider socio-cultural and environmental values?

Often driven by a lack of adequate trail options and the desire for personalized riding experiences, unauthorized trail building is a prominent issue in mountain biking

communities. Cameron Ross (December 8, 2020), a trail builder, caught and charged for building an unauthorized trail in North Vancouver, captures the sentiment:

There's nothing malicious about it [building illegal trails], of course [...] people just enjoy it [...] they're not trying to break the rules. They kind of just want to ride their own trails and...have their own scene, kind of thing, within mountain biking. [...] They're not trying to stick it to the man or anything like that. They're bored of riding the same old [trails][...] I mean, there's big companies and pro athletes that are advertising this [culture of building your own trails to ride] [...] that's encouraging people to go find these illegal trails and ride them and continue to maintain them. [...] there's no repercussions for those kinds of companies or brands.

Ross identifies a key element in mountain biking history: prior to the authorization of trails inside of the *Forest Range Practices Act (FRPA)* in the early 2000s, the majority of trails on the land base were unauthorized. It was not until 2006, when policy changes and pilot projects began, that trails started to become authorized (Ministry of Tourism, 2006). This historical context is critical to understand the persistent challenge of unauthorized trail building, which continues to complicate land use management on all types of lands. TJ Neault (November 10, 2020), Director of Trail Development and Indigenous Relations from the Columbia Valley Cycling Society, explains their trail organizations battle with unauthorized trail building:

That's a struggle. The official standpoint of the club is, we can't support unauthorized development of mountain bike trails in the region. But we do have to have some empathy and compassion and understand that there is a need for more trails. And if we can't build it as a club, and Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC) is unable to do their part in managing the land and getting us what needs to happen to this region, then we have to be understanding of that, it will happen. [...] So, this is a good conversation that the club has had and a few club members, like we don't want to be the police in a few club members, our social license bringing that back into play as we need to be more active. With setting the standard, and not promoting unauthorized development. So the way that I personally tried to do it is, is at least try to steer people away. If they're going to be building trails, don't go build here, at least don't build here. This is the worst spot that you can go. And if you have to build, don't do it here.

Ross and Neault both argue that unauthorized trails are often constructed due to users not having enough trail options, yet recent research that examined trail development in BC reports that 51% (n = 187) of survey respondents indicated that yes, they feel there are

enough trails in the province (Neumann, 2019). There is a well-documented history of the first generation of mountain bikers, often referred to as freeriders, in both Kamloops and North Vancouver. Ross's comment teases that the counterculture in current mountain biking still possesses a desire to build and maintain their own trails. This is directly tied to the affective ride experience received from riding a new trail. It is primarily about consuming the experience of riding on soft soil often referred to as loam (Hagen & Boyes, 2016). Unauthorized trail building is problematic for all elements of sustainable trail and tourism development, and challenges relationships at each stage of these processes.

Neault's comments underline the tension between the need for more trails and the constraints faced by organizations and land managers to address unauthorized building. Unauthorized trail building has long served as an informal training ground for aspiring and experienced trail builders within the mountain bike community (Taylor & Sand, 2021). Neault teases, without answering frankly, that some members of their trail organization are likely taking part in unauthorized trail building. The duality here is complex and could lead to inconsistent standards in trail quality, safety and environmental impacts. The persistence of unauthorized trail building reflects a broader issue within the culture of mountain biking: a desire for new experiences and the freedom to create and ride on one's own terms (Hagen & Boyes, 2016). However, this desire directly conflicts with sustainable land use practices and often competes against the goals of land managers to preserve socio-cultural and environmental values.

### **Trails as a Tourism Product**

The impacts of marketing, social media, and technology on tourist behavior and decision making have been widely examined and it reveals that marketing, especially social media can influence tourist-decision making, views on sustainability and appropriate use (Leung et al., 2012; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Neumann & Mason, 2019; Neumann & Mason, 2022; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Neumann and Mason (2019) emphasize that effective trail management requires not only embracing new technologies but also fostering strong partnerships among stakeholders. They state that, "In order to maintain capacity to manage trails effectively, managers must embrace new technologies and work together with other operators, marketing organizations, industries, trail associations and government

organizations” (p. 16). This perspective is further reinforced in their more comprehensive study on transportation and digital technologies in backcountry tourism, where they underscore the interconnectedness of trail management challenges. Their research (Neumann & Mason, 2022) explores how technological advancements influence access, trail usage, and environmental sustainability. The broader analysis provided in their 2022 work calls for an even deeper collaborative effort, integrating technological tools and fostering strong partnerships to adaptively manage evolving recreational landscapes while addressing social, economic, and environmental concerns. Regardless, there still a disconnection between trail organizations and provincial destination marketing organizations, especially in rural and Indigenous locations. This can exacerbate the challenges of trail maintenance, access, and user experience by marketing’s ability to shift user demand. Pawliuk (December 1, 2020), reflects on his experience with tourism marketing and summarizes his experience trying to align with provincial tourism marketing organizations:

I think we've noticed that we don't align with them [destination marketing organizations] yet. What we've noticed is that we are just not getting assisted in the right way. We're all saying super, natural British Columbia<sup>3</sup>, come to British Columbia and come to our outdoors and use our trails and use our lakes and use our rivers and yet Recreation Sites and Trails BC, is probably the most underfunded government organization that exists right now. That is why people are coming to BC, so I think we have things pretty well backwards. Destination BC spends millions on marketing, and I think just last year, they finally switched a little bit because of pressure from people like us that stand up in meetings and go like, unless you can start giving us maintenance money, stop marketing. Unless you can step up a little bit, stop this promotion of something that you really have no idea what you're promoting. That's been a big deal.

Pawliuk exemplifies how a disconnect between trail infrastructure development and the marketing of mountain bike tourism development can often result in poor relationships and discordant experiences of all types of mountain bikers on trails. His comment alludes to how marketing collateral can expedite consumption of experiences and challenge trail organization's ability to adequately maintain and develop trail infrastructure.

In some communities, marketing may be the catalyst that permits the local economy to diversify and transition from primarily resource extraction to more of a mixed economy. In

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Super, Natural British Columbia’ is the province of BC’s main brand and tagline (Destination British Columbia, n.d.).

the case of Smithers, BC, it was not a conscious decision to choose mountain biking as a tourism product. What started as a recreational pursuit for locals evolved into a tourism product after marketing campaigns showcased the quality of the trails and enticed tourists to come experience them. Leanne Helkenberg (December 10, 2020) of the Smithers Mountain Bike Association states that choosing mountain biking as a tourism product “was not a conscious decision [...] the tourism aspect of it is kind of secondary. It's like, oh, wow, like we didn't realize at that time, that wasn't a realization that it could increase tourism.” For a marketing organization to be beneficial to a community, there needs to be a solid relationship and consultation between the trail organization and the local marketing organization. These two groups are tied to the larger provincial destination marketing organization, Destination British Columbia, which, as Pawluik explains above, is also necessary to maintain relationships with at the local level.

In addition to trail and marketing organizations, land managers must also understand the impacts of marketing trails. Pawluik and Helkenberg’s perspectives reveal the gap between tourism marketing efforts and trail development planning and maintenance to sustain higher volumes of users. This disconnect strains resources and complicates the ability of communities and land managers to align trail access and inventory with the host communities broader socio-cultural and environmental goals. Littlejohn’s final pillar of mountain bike tourism infrastructure development is to “have a land manager that supports mountain bike tourism” (October 14, 2020). Dale Douglas, owner of Tyax Adventures, is a commercial operator who specializes in floatplane accessed mountain biking. He describes a lack of collaboration among the various provincial ministries in charge of land management:

That nobody in the provincial government talks to each other. They're all separate little towers. And nobody communicates back and forth. So, they all have their own little area of responsibility, nobody really wants to make a decision that potentially could hurt somebody. And as far as adventure tourism goes, there's nobody in the government that's actually responsible for adventure tourism's land base. (November 9, 2020)

Douglas’s observations speak to the bureaucratic challenges that hinder effective land use planning. His concern is that the lack of communication and collaboration among governmental bodies leads to fragmented decision making, which can undermine efforts of

those trying to develop mountain bike tourism products and infrastructure. This is particularly problematic in regions where mountain bike tourism is viewed through the lens of tourism rather than as an integral part of land planning. Douglas's view is particularly important as commercial operators in mountain biking often blur the lines of trail organization, marketing, and tour operator. This makes them a unique partner that engages in all aspects of trail, and more broadly, land development.

Commercial operators have the ability to establish a legal interest on a trail that may not be formally established or under management of a trail organization or RSTBC via a Crown land tenure. This potentially makes them the de facto trail manager or organization. David Gagnon (October 15, 2020), a commercial operator from Golden, BC and the executive director of the Professional Mountain Bike Instructors Association (PMBIA), underscores the provinces' role in decision making to manage trail access and inventory issues related to commercial operators. He states: "I think it's the government [responsibility]. They're the one holding the keys to open this up, or to make it easier, to make it harder." He believes there is a lack of education regarding the requirements to operate commercially on Crown land, and that this causes in-fighting amongst operators. This conflict, can encourage operators to use unauthorized trails or to use trails without maintaining or offsetting their impacts:

The process to get the license from the government is still hard. [...] people come to me, like, "I'm about to start my own business", and I'm like "okay, do you have a tenure? Nope! Do you have your PMBIA 1? Nope!" [...] because of the lack of information there on how to get a tenure and what should be included in your business plan, I think that could potentially create conflict. I mean, it did, but it doesn't really last long. I think those people [with business start-ups] find out that the best practices are this and that, then they just leave or stop [running their business]  
David Gagnon (October 15, 2020).

Gagnon's perspective illuminates the importance and need for clear guidelines and support from not just government, but all land managers, to manage the influx of commercial operators. He adds to this and offers his opinion on Golden Cycling Club's (GCC)<sup>4</sup> sentiments regarding mountain bike tourism:

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<sup>4</sup> Golden BC's main mountain bike trail organization maintaining and developing trails.

Let's just make one thing clear with GCC and tourism [...] I don't think they see tourism as a good thing. Or like this sort of local like, "oh, man, there's too many people on the trails." They [the GCC] look at tourism in Golden as "hey guys you're inviting people to come here and to use our trails, but what do we get in return? We have to put more time into maintenance. We have to put more time into this, into that, more money into that. But you guys are not really helping with that because you're sending all these tourists to come here." From the perspective I have from them, from the Golden Cycling Club, they're not that stoked on this huge increase [in users] that doesn't bring revenue, really.

Without proper oversight and regulation, commercial activities can heighten issues related to unauthorized trail use, strain resources dedicated maintenance and discourage businesses from operating as responsible stewards on the land.

Mountain bike tourism commercial operators are an issue for trail access and development. An increase in commercial operators can shift user experiences, strain resources, create divisiveness amongst operators, and in some instances, leads to unauthorized trail maintenance, use, and construction. However, there are instances where operators and proponents of mountain bike tourism have success, often having to do with the concept of social license. Social license is well-documented as a key tool that private and governmental organizations use to reduce mistrust from host communities. However, it remains unclear whether the intent behind its use is genuinely altruistic or simply a strategic move to gain acceptance (Hale & Belanger, 2015).

As the only province in Western Canada with an industry trade association, the Western Mountain Bike Tourism Association (MBTA), it adds an interesting layer to the complex dynamics of land use conflict to and from other vested interest holders. As Gagnon points out above, this directed tourism resource may also further constrain trail access and inventory by increasing the demand for a trail experience in areas that might not be able to support it. As the executive director of the MBTA, Littlejohn (October 14, 2020) recognizes this challenge and asserts that social license could be a key factor to ensure marketing promotions have a positive impact:

Building social licenses is challenging, obviously, we were promoting a resource that struggles for it to be maintained properly. So, there's certainly an element of that, but again, I try to be as aware as possible about some of the challenges and the pressure points and that sort of stuff, and don't want to push too hard. You could take the whole approach in a different direction, and really be aggressive and just try to really be out there searching for every opportunity to kind of expand mountain biking in the province, but I don't think that's the right approach.

Mountain bike tourism developers are often key proponents in planning, developing, and maintaining trails. The next section builds a better understanding of how their social license relates to the pillars of mountain bike trail development, and how that influences the relationship with trail organizations who generally are responsible for all aspects of managing and developing trail infrastructure. Each of these aspects help determine what the critical success factors for sustainable trail development are, and how to better prepare landowners and land managers for trail development.

### **Partnership Agreements and Trail Development on Crown Land: Legislative Frameworks, Indigenous Rights, and Land Use Planning**

As overviewed in Chapter 2, there are legislative frameworks that control and direct how each of the pillars of development and criteria for trail sustainability interact with the land. The majority of trail development on Crown land occurs within legislative mechanisms largely within Sections 56, 57, 58 and 118 of the *Forest Range Practices Act* (FRPA) (Forest and Range Practices Act, 2002), the Adventure Tourism Policy via the *Land Act*, Partnership Agreements (PA) (FRPA, Section 118) and the *Occupiers Liability Act*. Importantly, Crown land in BC is contested territory where very few land agreements have been signed between First Nations and the provincial and federal governments. With most of the trail development occurring on provincial Crown land, there is a clear coupling of trail organizations and various provincial ministries through the establishment of a PA. PAs are what the province enters with a trail organization to maintain or manage a recreation site or trail on behalf of the province. They are not required to perform maintenance or construct a trail (a Section 57 authorization can provide this ability to any proponent), however, most established and authorized trail networks that are promoted as mountain bike tourism destinations have a trail organization that are managing the trail networks via a PA. PAs are an integral piece of trail

sustainability because this agreement sets boundaries for the agreement holders' rights and responsibilities, defines their scope of work (how they will maintain and manage the trail sustainability), and are an important legal liability and risk management tool as they help define care, custody, and control of the land.

The coupling of PAs to trail organizations could reinforce the issue of the sense of entitlement within trail organizations and mountain bikers. This must be considered whenever there is an application to develop more trail infrastructure, especially in regard to the ongoing dynamics of land management on unceded territory in BC. Marcia Bennett, Recreation Officer with RSTBC, clarifies that the province understands the direct challenges to develop and manage trails on unceded territory, and proposes “that any proposal to build a trail automatically triggers a conflict” (November 9, 2020). Whether positive or negative, these conflicts add to the layers of complexity of land use. Bennett's point mainly concerns authorized trails and formal proposals for maintenance, development, or construction, often coming from a trail organization. Entitlement is an important link to this discussion of unauthorized trails vs. authorized trails and how the administration of a partnership agreement defines the role of trail organization and assigns responsibility to them via trail development. Research supports heightened regulation, management, and establishment of protected areas as necessary to reduce the environmental impacts of mountain biking and recognizes that creating boundaries or vested interest on the land further displace Indigenous peoples and reinforces colonial systems of land management (Cruikshank, 2005; Freeman & Thomlinson, 2014; Mason, 2014; Pickering & Barros, 2015). The process for issuing authorization to build trails on Crown land is a complex issue according to Patrick Lucas, founder of the Indigenous Youth Mountain Biking Program and Consultant at Land, Forest, People Consulting. He believes it can complicate the assertion of Indigenous rights and title, but also that trail organizations and mountain bike tourism developers can change this narrative:

Yes, absolutely it can [complicate the assertion of Indigenous rights]. It can do that in a number of different ways by causing the implementation of various types of authoritative declarations on their territory, whether it's [...] a section 56, section 57, anytime one of those is issued, it becomes an interest on that parcel, and it leads to concrete actions on the land. So it creates a trail that people are using. So if a First Nation is making a land claim, saying, well, this is an area that we use for traditional uses, we use it for this, we use it for that the government's like, “yeah, but now there's this trail there, and all my constituents are using it.” It's another barrier that they have to address and deal with in terms of asserting their rights and title. It doesn't have to be that way, though. This is where they [trail organization, builder or club] can [...] flip things on its head. (November 2, 2020)

Thomas Schoen (November 10, 2020), CEO of First Journey Trails, a trail planning, consulting, and contracting company based out of Williams Lake, elaborates on Lucas' assertion to explain that trail development could benefit from a consensus-based land planning model, and that trail development must be prepared to accept ‘no’ as an answer:

We can't do anything without First Nations involvement and their consent. But we have to realize, if we throw that question out there, do you want to partner up with us? Do you want to see development happen? They say no. And if they say no, we have to accept it and step away? It doesn't mean it's a no for the next 50 years. Or we're not going to go back there a month from now and ask them the same question again. And I think that's just so important. And it's so important in our world, in recreational infrastructure development, we have to be totally inclusive. But we have to recognize this might not be what our small mountain bike segment want to see. This might not be the development that we want to see. But we have to answer the questions we have. We have to open it up. In general, I think it's good for us, I think will benefit from it. But we are taking a risk if we open ourselves up.

PAs are important because these agreements are one of the main mechanisms giving responsibility and power to trail organizations. Additionally, vis-a-vis these agreements, it brings trail organizations into the land use planning process and potentially into direct conversation with Indigenous rights and title. Having a seat at the land planning table is key to influence the ability of communities and land managers to consider socio-cultural and environmental sustainability values related to trail access and development. Interviewees stressed themes of collaboration and consensus-based land planning in positive ways. The sentiment is exemplified by Phil McIntyre-Paul (October 14, 2020), Executive Director of the Shuswap Trail Alliance, who poses that trail organizations should take the time to ask, “who isn't here that we need to invite?” when considering trail development planning. Although it may be a more time-consuming process, he believes it is one of the benefits that

trail organizations can provide to the Indigenous community, whose lands they operate on. In general, across BC's Mountain bike tourism industry, this idea is well supported.

### **Navigating Trail Infrastructure Development: Balancing Statutory Decision-making, Indigenous Rights, and Broader Land Use Planning**

The intricate landscape of trail infrastructure development in BC unfolds as a multifaceted tapestry woven with challenges stemming from unauthorized trail construction and the reliance on volunteer efforts. It is also at a critical intersection with Indigenous rights and sustainable community development. Trail development not only impacts recreational landscapes, but also carries profound implications for environmental sustainability, community resilience, and the fulfillment of Indigenous rights and title.

The Section 57 process under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA) plays a pivotal role to shape the landscape for partnership agreement holders or trail organizations engaged in trail development. This process, as articulated by Tennessee Trent (December 4, 2020), Trail Manager at RSTBC, involves a complex adjudication system, is often criticized for perceived delays, but also for denying applications when necessary. He states: "It's tough because we get criticized all the time because we're too slow on adjudicating section 57 applications. And then if we ever say no, people don't want to hear that." He continues, referencing a presentation I gave on how commercial operations can partner with trail organizations, Section 57 applications and adventure tourism tenure applications at the 2019 Mountain Bike Tourism Symposium in Revelstoke:

I remember in Revelstoke, where you said, "be ready to hear no." And all of us public servants really appreciated that. Sometimes if you make an application, there's two answers, or maybe there's three. There's 'yes, but' or there's a pure "yes" and also there's "no." [Trail organizations should] be ready for it [no]. (December 4, 2020)

The trail organizations or PA holders may not fully comprehend the depth of the process and framework behind the decision. Trent (December 4, 2020) elaborates that, in conjunction with a section 57, there are other statutes in the act that Recreation Officers need to consider. Ultimately, the primary challenge in decision-making lies in fulfilling the responsibilities of a Statutory Decision Maker (SDM):

The first principle in statutory decision making is First Nations consultation and considerations of Indigenous values. [...] And there's questions about access and sustainable development plans, and how good was that application in the first place when it came in? And what kind of homework was actually done [by the trail organization]? [...] We'd like to be able to say yes more and yes quicker [...] but we have roles as governments. And it's kind of a tricky one for our staff, as statutory decision makers, where we're kind of like the advocates within the ministry for the recreation sector [...] and are also the decision makers.

As Trent explains, the process and decision making prior to accepting a proposal to develop trail infrastructure is complex, and the priority in the decision-making process is consultation and considerations with Indigenous communities to respect their values. Logically, this leads to an exploration of the effects of land use planning on mountain biking.

While there is still an under representation of Indigenous perspectives, and other types of outdoor recreation, mountain bikers in general are well represented in land use planning exercises (Booth & Halseth, 2011; Freeman, 2011; Harshaw et al., 2006; Morton et al., 2012). Compared to forestry, mining, agriculture and energy, adventure tourism and mountain biking are underrepresented (Gooch, 2013). Chapter 1 revealed that trail organizations may possess power in the planning process due to their capacity and level of organization and ability to navigate the legislative policy processes. It places statutory decision makers (Recreation Officers) as advocates for trail development, and some may see this as a conflict that reinforces colonial power structures and perspectives. Statutory decision making is multifaceted, and with the primary principle emphasizing First Nations consultation and consideration, it reflects the evolving nature of land planning. Yet, the challenge for statutory decision makers is in how they can avoid compartmentalization in planning. As someone directly involved in these processes in Revelstoke, Bennett (November 9, 2020), describes how land use planning is evolving in her region and how there are more requests for land planning in a recreational context:

We [RSTBC and the local trail organization] have only done the mountain biking trail plans, we're just addressing it in a really small [area][...]I guess we're separating one use type. And we could do that potentially with all the other recreation use types. We're just not looking at the big picture. When you make the plans, you're looking at the big picture, but you're not having the entire big picture at the table, and we can't plan for everyone. You're looking at the big picture and making a plan for one thing and how it fits in. And that's something realistic that we can do with our program, but obviously we can't do the bigger picture that the province isn't willing to do.

Bennett's observation emphasizes the need for more perspectives in trail planning and urges the consideration of the entire recreational landscape to avoid compartmentalization. This issue raises questions about the efficacy of the current approach to address the larger socio-cultural and environmental values encompassed within mountain bike tourism development. During the engagement with Indigenous Nations portion of creating the 2021 provincial trails strategy, Trent highlights that they “asked for opinions of everyone [the 203 Indigenous communities], but we didn't get the chance to talk to them all. We heard from 41,” (December 4, 2020). This exemplifies a clear barrier to land planning processes: adequate systems, support, and time to ensure Indigenous communities are involved. Shelley Witzky (December 7, 2020) from Cstélnec (Adams Lake Indian Band), proposes that the lack of Indigenous participation may be because Indigenous communities hold different values than strictly to increase tourism regarding the land proposed for mountain bike trail development. Importantly, she also highlights that more funding is needed from the provincial government to increase diversity in planning:

We don't want to encroach too far out, just enough to accommodate the new amount of people coming in. But not just like I said, rampant development. And let's just take down a whole forest just for this. But just a little bit more proper planning and management, and more funding. That means more funding from the government. (December 7, 2020)

When asked who she believes should be responsible for managing and planning recreational land, Witzky posits that “well, right now, I believe it is co-management.” Co-management might be a solution, however, in Douglas’ region and in other interviews, the theme of compartmentalization in planning recurred. Both Witzky and Douglas reveal how disconnects in BC’s policy, resources and structures greatly limit the extent to which

mountain bike tourism and trail development can advance Indigenous rights in land use planning.

## **The Role of Volunteers in Trail Management and Maintenance**

The management and maintenance of trail networks relies heavily on the commitment, dedication, and labour of volunteers and volunteer managed trail organizations (Provincial Trails Advisory Board, 2021). While the contributions of these individuals are invaluable, the increasing demands of trail maintenance and development due to the growth in tourism raise significant concerns about the sustainability and struggles of a volunteer-driven model. This section critically examines the challenges associated with relying on volunteers for trail management and maintenance, particularly within the context of financial constraints, the evolving needs of trail networks, and the broader implications for rural and Indigenous communities.

### *The Unsustainable Reliance on Volunteers: A Request for More Resources*

As trail networks expand and mountain biking is used as the tool to transition economies, the complexity of trail management increases, and the reliance on volunteer labour presents significant limitations and challenges. The capacity of volunteers is reaching a critical tipping point for Littlejohn (October 14, 2020), Executive Director of Mountain Bike Tourism BC:

We're sort of reaching that capacity from our base of volunteers that are ... basically the responsibility...that lives on their shoulders. But whether they want that respect, responsibility or not, that's just the way it kind of works currently, but we are trying to get that message out that there needs to be more of a partnership with governments.

Compounding the limits of volunteer capacity is the actual decline of volunteerism (Grimm & Dietz, 2018; Holmes et al., 2021). The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (2023) recently raised concerns over the future of volunteerism for recreation and non-profit organizations citing a decline in numbers and capacity. Schoen (November 10, 2020) sees the decline of volunteerism challenging land managers ability to maintain and manage current trail inventories and thinks “it’s going to become a bigger issue over the next decade,

volunteerism is declining.” Yet he also believes that a turnover in volunteer management could be a positive thing for communities, specifically Indigenous communities. He explains: “The people who join a mountain bike club [trail organization], at an executive level are a unique group. I see this in every club that I work with, they’re all very, very strong-minded type-A personalities,” and this transition could be the catalyst for welcoming broader perspectives to the planning and management of assets.

The reliance on volunteers often leads to inconsistencies in trail maintenance and management due to capacity. Schoen, whose job is trail planning, consulting, and construction, said, “I’m really struggling with proposing new trail developments to communities,” (November 10, 2020) unless there is a clear ability for them to manage and maintain their trails. He, and other professional trail planners and consultants, generally believe that the inconsistencies can compromise both the quality and safety of the trails, posing risks to users and the environment alike. The volunteer model is particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in availability and commitment, which can result in periods of neglect or uneven maintenance efforts. This is especially problematic in regions where trails serve as critical infrastructure for recreation and tourism. This underscores the need for a more sustainable approach to trail management. Pawliuk (December 1, 2020), provides his recommendations to build capacity:

My recommendation to any non for profit is whether it's five hours a week or 20 hours a week, hire somebody to deal with a lot of the paperwork and a lot of that groundwork, that's really, really going to help with some of the overload that these volunteers are going to get. So, the capacity of volunteers.

While volunteer capacity is reaching its limits, the challenge is further intensified by a decline in volunteerism, raising concerns about the sustainability of trail management and the ability to maintain growing networks effectively.

### *Financial Constraints and the Challenges of Not-for-Profit Organizations*

Most trail organizations operate as not-for-profits, grappling with persistent financial instability. These organizations typically rely on a combination of grants, donations, and membership fees to fund their activities. However, this financial model is often insufficient to meet the demands of trail maintenance, let alone the expansion or improvement of existing

networks. As Gagnon comments, "There's not a lack of resources. There's a lack of clear direction from the government," (October 15, 2020). This emphasizes the disconnect between available funding and the actual needs of trail organizations.

A prevailing narrative within the trail community is that there are too many trails and insufficient funding for their maintenance. This situation is exacerbated by the allocation of most available funding opportunities being awarded to new trail construction rather than to the maintenance of existing trails. Trent (December 4, 2020) exemplifies this issue with the Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program (CERIP) and Forest Employment Program (FEP) funds, two different funding opportunities for trail development:

CERIP and FEP is a lot of money going into [new trail construction], in some cases maintenance. But the concern from our end is the long term, bunch of new construction, a big stimulus. We've seen this in the past where there's a bunch of investment which is great, but it doesn't come with that long term maintenance plan and resourcing and so it's setting us up for burning out volunteers and that kind of thing into the future.

Volunteer organizations have repeatedly called for increased maintenance funding, yet these pleas often go unheard, as financial resources continue to be directed toward development projects. This misalignment between funding priorities and on-the-ground needs further strains the volunteer model, making it increasingly untenable.

### *Implications for Rural and Indigenous Communities*

Challenges associated with volunteer-driven trail management can be particularly pronounced in rural and Indigenous communities. In these contexts, trails are often seen as vital assets for tourism and economic development. The emphasis on new trail construction to attract visitors can overshadow the critical need for sustainable management of existing trails or the long-term costs. Witzky (December 7, 2020) believes the top resources that could improve her community's capacity to manage not just trails, but land in general, are education/training, representation for her community in land planning, and sustainable funding. Developing a tourism product that has a high reliance on volunteer labour in communities that may already be under-resourced, may intensify existing inequalities and place additional burdens on local populations. Tom Eustache (November 10, 2020) says his biggest challenge for managing trails and land within the Simpcw First Nation is "having the

resources to do it. And to try and get everyone in this valley to believe that what we're doing is in the best interest of everyone, not only us [mountain bikers'] but everyone that lives in the valley." Eustache also highlights that regardless of pressure from tourists and tourism, it is important for communities to do what is within their means:

I say let's not make it bigger than we can handle. Because with this long section of trail here now it's going to be a big section to clear, and it's getting harder and harder. And we realized that this year that it's creating windstorms and climate change, you probably had that on there that it gets harder and harder to maintain them because of that. (November 10, 2020)

Gagnon (October 15, 2020) believes the lack of professional expertise within many trail organizations compounds these challenges thinking that "there needs to be a body of qualified, certified knowledgeable people that can lay out a book that says, hey, you're a not-for-profit organization maintaining the trails near [your] community? Well, this is the book you're going to have to follow." This statement demonstrates the need for professional guidance in trail management, particularly in complex situations where environmental, social, and cultural considerations intersect.

#### *The Need for Sustainable Funding and Professional Expertise*

The financial constraints faced by not-for-profit trail organizations often result in volunteers being overwhelmed by administrative and operational tasks. This burden detracts from the time and energy volunteers can dedicate to actual trail work, further diminishing the effectiveness of their efforts. Pawliuk's advice is to "hire somebody to deal with a lot of the paperwork and a lot of that groundwork," (December 1, 2020) emphasizing the need for professional support to alleviate the pressures on volunteers. Whereas Littlejohn believes that with more funding for operations and maintenance, communities:

Can build their capacity to have people in these roles that aren't necessarily volunteers, it's kind of critical. So I think that's...the direction we're going in is that there's always going to be a role for volunteers, we don't want to discourage volunteerism, but at the same time, we need paid staff to support the volunteers as well wherever possible....but I think it's just as important and perhaps has much greater long-term benefit. And then just purely fundraising to buy tools and materials to maintain trails, again, the access funding and grants and those kinds of things and advocating on behalf of the organization with those that do have influence such as their municipal governments and so forth (October 14, 2020)

While volunteers play an essential role in the management and maintenance of trail networks, the current reliance on their labour is increasingly unsustainable. The challenges of financial instability, the complexity of trail management, and the specific needs of rural and Indigenous communities all point to the necessity of a more robust and professional approach to trail management. Sustainable funding models that prioritize the maintenance of existing trails, support for volunteer organizations, and the integration of professional expertise, are critical to ensure the long-term viability of trail networks. Witzky notes, "it [referring to support for trail and land management] would have to be funded properly in order for that to happen," (December 7, 2020) highlighting the urgent need for systemic change in how trails are managed and maintained. Without such changes, the future of trail networks – and the communities that depend on them – remains uncertain.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter navigated the complexities of land use in mountain bike tourism and explored different interviewee's experiences of balancing the needs of the land, the people, and the communities involved. This chapter has shown how the rapid growth of mountain biking in BC has put immense pressure on both the natural environment and the communities involved in managing trail infrastructure. It highlighted that the increasing reliance on volunteer-driven models for trail management, although foundational, is becoming unsustainable as demand for trail access, development, and tourism continues to grow.

The results indicate that there is success when using adaptive management strategies that incorporate environmental, social, and economic sustainability. It also highlights the need for greater inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and rights in land use planning and the need for more industry best practices and standards. BC's commitment to incorporating the

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples through the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* is essential to respect and address the challenges Indigenous peoples face in the context of mountain bike tourism and trail development. Indigenous communities have been, and continue to be, marginalized in land use decision-making processes. The persistent issue of unauthorized trail building reflects deeper tensions within the mountain bike community and presents ongoing issues for landowners and managers striving to balance user demands to access new experiences with sustainable practices. Each of these aspects greatly challenge the ability of mountain bike tourism development to move forward in a sustainable way. However, as explored in this chapter, there are examples of mountain bike tourism developers taking a more inclusive and equitable approach, which showcases this industry's ability to transform the colonial frameworks that still shape our governance systems.

Moreover, aligning trail development and planning practices with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2018) is crucial. Goals like sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and life on land (SDG 15) should guide these efforts. This means promoting environmental stewardship, to ensure that economic benefits are shared equitably with local and Indigenous communities and foster genuine community participation in the planning process. This chapter argues for a transition towards a more sustainable model that does not overburden volunteers, but instead supports them with professional expertise and sustainable funding. The reliance on volunteers for trail maintenance and management is identified as a major limiting factor, especially in rural and Indigenous communities, where resources are often scarce. Furthermore, this chapter shows a need for sustainable funding models that prioritize maintenance of existing trails and resources for capacity building necessary for the long-term success and viability of communities who want to use mountain biking to diversify their economies.

There is a need for a more holistic and collaborative approach to mountain bike tourism development. The future of mountain bike tourism in BC hinges on how communities and the industry adapt to these challenges. By considering the principles of UNDRIP and the SDGs, we can move towards a more sustainable approach to mountain bike tourism development. A sustainable approach better respects the values of rural and

Indigenous communities whose territories mountain biking occurs by integrating Indigenous knowledge and addressing the environmental and social impacts early-on. Examples of this include: 1) involving Indigenous community members in all aspects of trail planning, design, and layout to consider impacts to local food systems or how to best move through the landscape with harmony; 2) collaborating with communities to increase opportunities for language and culture to be present on signage and wayfinding; 3) integrating community values and interests on what types of trails best suit the terrain or do not, and most importantly; 4) deeply considering Traditional Ecological Knowledge to conceptualize seasonal challenges in planning due to the in-depth knowledge local communities have of their ecosystems.

Without these critical integrations of Indigenous knowledge, the mountain bike tourism industry could simply replicate the exploitation of earlier resource extraction industries and reaffirm the colonial violence and power-dynamics that have negatively impacted so many communities throughout the province.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR: REFLECTIONS ON THE EVOLUTION OF MOUNTAIN BIKE TOURISM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

### **Critical Reflection and the Application of Research Findings**

This thesis is a product of significant perseverance and reflection, developed and revised over the course of four years starting in 2020 and continuing to 2024, a period characterized by profound global and personal events. The journey of this research, deeply rooted in the context of BC, unfolded during a time marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme climate change events, and a massive shift in the mountain biking industry, both in popularity and infrastructure development.

During COVID-19, I was forced to take a break from my project as I had to shut down my entrepreneurial pursuits, running my mountain bike event company, and transition into full-time employment with McElhanney, a consulting firm specializing in outdoor recreation infrastructure, as a Project Manager in their Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure division where I was specializing in mountain bike trail development and planning among other construction projects. Coming out of COVID, I subsequently sold my event company, only to repurchase it and operate mountain bike events across Canada in 2023. In the same year, I left McElhanney to pursue consulting via my own firm. I am fortunate as my work and play have given me a lot of perspective and allowed for critical reflection on the operational and strategic aspects of mountain biking tourism, particularly in relation to the challenges and opportunities faced by rural and Indigenous communities in BC, which is where most of my work occurs. I am grateful that mountain biking is my livelihood, and for the many people who provided the rich context and honest dialogue. Throughout the entirety of my research and writing, Dr. Courtney Mason remained steadfast in reassuring me that each moment of transition, challenge, or life event, would only benefit and create valuable knowledge for my industry. Thank you, Courtney. All the experiences I have gathered informed the perspectives and recommendations presented in this thesis, particularly concerning the importance of sustainable and equitable development practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on global societies. The pandemic has reshaped the way people interact with outdoor spaces and catalyzed a surge in the popularity of mountain biking as a form of recreation and tourism (Jackson et al., 2021;

Pröbstl-Haider et al., 2023). In BC, the pandemic accelerated trends that were already emerging, as more individuals sought outdoor activities that allowed for physical distancing and connection with nature. It was estimated that 95% of Canadians were using trails (all types, not just mountain biking) to enhance their mental health during COVID (Trans Canada Trail, 2020). This period of increased participation highlighted the critical role of trail networks in supporting public health and well-being, as well as the economic importance of outdoor recreation for rural and Indigenous communities.

In addition to the pandemic, BC has experienced a series of extreme climate events during the period of this research, including wildfires, floods, and heatwaves. These events not only impacted the natural environment, but also pose significant challenges for the management and maintenance of trail networks (Mason & Neumann, 2024). For the first time in my life living in BC, trails and access to trails were closed to all residents due to wildfires (Kaisar, 2021). An unintended silver lining of these events has been an increase to funding opportunities for resiliency, repairs, and economic recovery. I garnered first-hand experience with the impact of these funds as I was the project manager for two large scale trail infrastructures that were funded by the Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program and the Destination Development Fund. The funding increase to capital projects is largely well received. However, this growth also brought to light the complexities of balancing development with the need for sustainable resources related to maintenance and management. It also indicated the need for better oversight and management of large-scale funding initiatives (OAGBC, 2022).

A recurring theme throughout this research is the critical importance of community engagement and collaboration in the development and management of mountain biking tourism. Since starting this project, my experience has been that this shift is happening in mountain biking. Mountain biking is adopting what this thesis has consistently advocated for, particularly with Indigenous communities, in the planning and implementation of trail projects. This includes meaningful consultation, co-management arrangements, and the incorporation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into trail design and management practices. The research findings suggest that a more inclusive and participatory approach to trail management can lead to more sustainable outcomes, both socially and environmentally. As mountain biking continues to grow in popularity, it is essential that the industry works

closely with communities to ensure that the benefits of tourism are shared equitably and that the negative impacts are minimized. Tennessee Trent (December 4, 2020), Director of Trails with the Recreation Sites and Trails BC, stated:

I think that there's a big change coming, and we're at the front end of it truly, I mean, I hope that we're emerging from 150 years of colonialism in BC and in Canada, and starting to shift towards this idea called reconciliation. [...] I think that the sort of fundamentals...like that working in a good way document, prescribed in that outdoor council publication are building relationships. Have conversations, build relationships. At the end of the day, we're all here on First Nations land and we're all looking for ways to have good lives and communities and families and to move forward.[...] Trails are more than that. Trails are cultural. There's cultural values associated with trails and heritage values and traditional use and current uses.

On this theme of community engagement, the province over the last few years has been engaging the mountain bike trail industry in preparation of a new Mountain Bike Trail Management Policy, Trail Difficulty Rating Matrix, and subsequent trail standards (Mountain Bike Pilot Project, 2022). This is a major talking point in the industry, and it is expected the final versions will be released in the fall or winter of 2024. Being involved in this process speaks of a more inclusive and participatory approach to trail management, and the province's welcoming of consultants and professionals in the process does inspire confidence that some of the points made early in my research are being actualized.

### **Limitations of the Research**

Mountain bike tourism is no panacea for any community. This research project was delimited to examine the impacts of mountain bike tourism within rural and Indigenous communities in BC. Certain delimitations were placed in order to achieve the research objectives. The two content chapters focus on socio-economic changes, environmental sustainability, and cultural challenges as a result of mountain bike tourism. The project explores trail use, land management policies or frameworks, and the involvement of various landowners, land managers and stakeholders. Choosing the province of BC as the study location adds value as this area is world-renowned for its mountain bike culture and ongoing dialogue around land use and Indigenous rights. Using semi-structured interviews with community leaders, tourism operators, statutory decision makers, tourism operators, trail

managers, Indigenous councillors, and community members, allows for in-depth insights into community impacts and their perspectives. Furthermore, I was able to increase the richness of the qualitative data via my position within the mountain biking industry, to increase opportunities for interviewees to be candid and provide deeper more meaningful conversations. However, this resulted in a limitation where some interview responses may be tempered due to my position.

The limitations of my research include geographical constraints whereby the findings are specific to BC, and in some instances, they are regionally or place specific. As such, the findings may not be directly transferable to other places without consideration of the contextual differences. Utilizing qualitative methods did provide deep insights, yet they are inherently subjective, and due to my position in the mountain bike community, the interpretations of the findings are inherently influenced by my perspectives. Similarly, due to my level of involvement in the industry and my demographic profile (37-year-old Caucasian, Euro-Canadian), the scope of the interviews may be limited by the availability or willingness of other key players to participate. This may have skewed perspectives, particularly in interviews with marginalized peoples, or where a power imbalance may have been perceived. Coupled to that is the fact that as a solo researcher, the extent to which I could conduct fieldwork and follow-ups was limited by logistical and financial resources. Fortunately, the onset of COVID shifted many people's comfort ability with virtual meetings. However, the constraints of resources meant that not being physically present for all interviews may have impacted the depth and level of connection with the interviewees. Lastly, this study has an inherent temporal limitation, this study represents a snapshot in time and only based on the conditions that were present during the timeframe of the research. Attitudes, dynamics, opinions, roles, and responsibilities are all dynamic, and due to the length of time between research and writing this thesis, the findings may not fully encapsulate future changes or long-term impacts. In stating these delimitations and limitations, I aim to acknowledge the scope and constraints present in the research and provide a clear understanding of where confidence can be applied and future research might be required.

## **Future Directions of Research**

The findings of this research open several avenues for future research and practical application. It is my intention to not only fill gaps identified in the research, but also to propose ways to increase the impact and application of the research outcomes. Future research opportunities may include socio-cultural and environmental impact studies: quantitative analysis that measures environmental changes more rigorously; examining policy effectiveness in protecting cultural and environmental values in relation to trails; and, exploring the role of technology to manage trail use, mitigate environmental impacts, and generate revenue for trail maintenance.

This research could be leveraged into future practical applications such as: developing enhanced community engagement models that prioritize the voices of Indigenous and local community members in trail planning and management; developing educational programs for tourists and communities about the cultural significance of lands and the importance of sustainable tourism practices to reduce conflicts and enhance cultural competency; and policy recommendations for local and provincial governments. Also, it is important to examine operational policies for trail organizations that provide suggestions for zoning, access rights, benefit-sharing models (i.e. for trail maintenance), and balancing tourism growth with environmental, conservation, and social equity. Lastly, performing economic data studies to formulate strategies to leverage mountain bike tourism for broader economic development and increase financial security would be valuable.

## **Call to Actions**

The mountain bike tourism industry has evolved significantly since the beginning of this research project, and, in general, appears to be reflecting on pressing challenges. To continue the evolution, I identify actions that could be considered by the mountain bike tourism industry to mitigate and control their impacts. Best practice guides, handbooks, or tools may be developed around these actions and based on this research.

### *Enhance Trail Development and Management Best Practices*

Prioritize climate change resiliency in trail development by developing a best practice guide that considers climate change, wildfires, and land degradation. This may require new types of infrastructure. This guide must include leveraging Traditional Ecological Knowledge and ensuring trail projects have comprehensive environmental assessments prior to development. In addition, this process may increase the involvement of professionals or experts in planning, design and construction. A guide like this requires advocating, lobbying, and encouraging long-term maintenance funding models that go beyond capital investment. They also need to explore funding models that balance trail development and infrastructure growth with allocations for continued maintenance and management of trails.

### *Foster Community Engagement and Collaboration*

Mountain bike tourism developers should promote co-management and ensure Indigenous perspectives are represented in all phases of trail planning, development, and management. Furthermore, they should support educational initiatives to foster awareness of land stewardship, cultural values, and the importance of sustainable tourism, among both tourists and locals alike, to build more inclusive community engagement practices.

### *Develop Equitable Benefit-Sharing Models*

It is important to establish internal and potentially broader policies that support equitable access to trails for all types of users, especially in rural and Indigenous communities or where socio-economic challenges may limit access to trail experiences. The goal would be to implement benefit-sharing mechanisms to ensure that mountain bike tourism revenue supports the immediate community, which may be done through employment opportunities (paid trail crew), reinvesting mountain bike tourism revenues in community services, and drawing on overarching tourism revenues for trail maintenance.

### *Advocate for Policy and Governance Improvements*

Establish an industry association that would collaborate with local and provincial governments to create and refine policies. Further, mountain bike tourism developers should support policy initiatives like the changes to the Mountain Bike Trail Management Policy.

This group could also assist with more stringent oversight and management of large-scale funding programs to ensure resources are allocated efficiently and align with long-term sustainability goals.

### *Promote Research and Data-Driven Decision-Making*

Encourage research that quantifies the environmental, social, and economic impacts of mountain bike tourism. The goal would be to help tailor strategies specific to the local community to ensure that mountain bike tourism development aligns with the broader community goals. In many cases, collecting the baseline data will be backed up by supporting data-driven decisions and long-term, cumulative impacts.

### *Address Entitlement*

To counter the patterns of entitlement that echo colonial resource extraction, mountain bike tourism developers, trail builders, and marketers must recognize their responsibility to avoid rebranding old power dynamics under the guise of outdoor recreation. The rise of outdoor recreation and mountain bike tourism economies can no longer justify unchecked expansion or the extension of infrastructure that replicates traditional resource-extractive industry's intrusion into natural and cultural landscapes. As forestry and other industries lose ground, mountain bike tourism is given an opportunity to enact a more conscious and respectful land ethic—yet this shift can only occur if stakeholders actively resist the entitlement narrative embedded in land use practices and work to dispel their narcissistic tendencies.

One clear example is the extension and use of forestry roads to facilitate trail development and user access, which not only disrupts ecosystems but perpetuates a legacy of altering landscapes for industrial use without fully considering Indigenous rights and long-term ecological impacts. Instead of repeating this model, the mountain bike industry must rethink infrastructure as a cooperative process rooted in Indigenous consultation and stewardship, with infrastructure developments planned around ecological preservation and cultural respect rather than convenience or economic efficiency.

Building respectful partnerships with Indigenous communities is key, with a focus on shared governance models and benefit-sharing rather than token consultation. For mountain

bike tourism developers and marketers, the ultimate responsibility is to disrupt the colonial frameworks, that would otherwise reify their presence, by embracing a more authentic stewardship ethic that prioritizes enduring ecological and cultural values, and truly serves its host communities.

## **Conclusion**

Numerous communities across BC who are expecting, or currently experiencing, a loss of livelihood, social inequality, and environmental degradation are considering mountain bike tourism. While the ecological and economic impacts of mountain biking have previously been researched, this study reveals a disconnect between large-scale tourism planning, the intricacies surrounding the assertion of Indigenous rights, and the broader context of managing land as a commodity. This research calls on mountain bike tourism developers to consider their social license and integrate fundamentals of sustainable development when using the land as a resource. The outcome of this study demonstrates that more resources, Indigenous led planning, and corporate social responsibility from tourism developers, are needed to better prepare rural and Indigenous communities that seek to transition their economies, develop their communities, and safeguard the environment. This thesis reflects the evolving landscape of mountain biking tourism in BC, which is shaped by global events, environmental challenges, and personal experience. It underscores the importance of adaptive management strategies that prioritize sustainability, community involvement, and equitable access to natural resources. As the mountain biking industry continues to grow, it is imperative that stakeholders remain vigilant to address the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of this development. This thesis aims to contribute to this ongoing dialogue, provide a framework for future research and action in the sustainable development of mountain biking tourism throughout BC and beyond.

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## **APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

This is a draft guide that will be used as a general guideline. Different interview groups will have specific questions in regard to their experiences and position.

#### **Position/Background**

- What position do you hold at your organization?
- How long have you been in this position?
- What is your experience with mountain bike tourism development?

### **MOUNTAIN BIKE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

- Is your community using (or planning to) mountain biking to attract visitors to your community?
- Is mountain biking a core tourism product for your community?
- Why is your community involved in mountain biking?
- What do you think is the largest demographic cohort of mountain bikers in your community?
- How do you perceive mountain bikers contribute to your local community?
- What impacts are/do you expect/expect from the growth of mountain bike tourism?
- What are the biggest concerns among mountain bikers in your area?
- Do you believe mountain bike tourism operators have the ability to contribute to host communities?

### **CONFLICT**

- Are there specific types of conflicts that currently exist regarding mountain biking in your community/organization?
  - Can you elaborate on how you think this conflict has evolved?
  - Does the history of land owners/managers influence conflict?
    - Can you speak to the relationship your organization/community has with the land owners/managers and how the history of these relationships have developed in relation to conflict management?

- How is the evolution of the mountain bike demographic shaping conflict between other stakeholders?
- Can you speak to the first time you experienced managing conflict?
  - How has conflict management evolved in your organization/community
- Are there best practices to manage conflict on mountain bike and multi-use trails?
- How do you solve issues of conflict between trail users?
- What are the key concerns regarding climate change in your area?
  - Do you believe climate change, or climate change events are creating opportunities for conflict?
- Do you believe mountain bike tourism operators (tours, guides, shuttle companies, coaches, and events) have the potential to increase or decrease conflict to the public and local users of trail infrastructure?
- Have you experienced conflict with resource extraction industries (forestry/logging, oil, and gas, mining, etc.)?
  - If so, did you reach a resolution?
- Many trails are accessed via forestry roads or other types of infrastructure developed by extraction industries. Can you speak to how your organization/community mitigates access with extraction industries?

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

- Is your community experiencing a loss/threat to livelihoods as a result of climate change?
- Are climate change events (fire, flood, drought, pine beetle) having an impact on trail tourism in your area?
  - Are there regional differences related to climate changes creating opportunities or threats for mountain bike tourism in your area?
- Are climate change events influencing your organization's view of tourism?
- Does your organization have a long-term plan on how to adapt/evolve with climate change?
  - Are there any strategies or tactics currently being employed?

- When did you first notice climate change influencing the development of your trail infrastructure and mountain bike tourism product?
- Do you believe mountain bike trail development/building (legal/sanctioned) is degrading the environment?
  - How would this differ to illegal/unsanctioned development/building?

## **MOUNTAIN BIKE AND LAND USE MANAGEMENT**

- Do you know who manages the mountain bike trails in your community?
  - How does this organization communicate with the different stakeholders?
  - How would you describe the relationship between the mountain bike club/trail society and your local government, land manager and Indigenous peoples?
- Do you believe mountain bike tourism operators have a responsibility to enhance social development in local communities?
  - What tactics could be employed by MTB tourism operators?
- Can you describe your experience planning sessions related to the development of mountain bike infrastructure?
- Have you ever been involved in a stakeholder consultation process with a mountain bike tourism operator or trail club?

## **LAND USE MANAGEMENT**

- Who do you believe is responsible for managing recreational land?
- What resources could improve your organization/community's capacity to manage lands?
- How has the land-use planning process evolved in your region?
  - What does consensus related to land-use planning in your region look like?
  - Are there any challenges in land-use planning that you believe are specific to your region?
  - How does your organization deal with unsanctioned/illegal trail building?
- Do you feel there is an imbalance of resources (physical or mental) apportioned to rural/Indigenous communities to engage/consult with management plans?

- Do you feel ‘experts’ in land use planning and consultation consider local knowledge?
- How does your organization/community address power differentials between stakeholders?
- Do you think Indigenous people are equally represented in recreational land-use planning?
- What is the relationship between recreation and Crown Land in your area?
  - Describe how boundaries, such as parks, recreation sites, trails may complicate Indigenous rights and title?
- Does the designation of the land influence how you develop and manage the site/trails?
  - How has the land designation process changed in recent years?
- Do you believe that trails within a park/protected area are given consistent designation and application of policy across the province? I.E. Are trails built under RSTBC designation given the same in Kamloops as Squamish?
  - Does this apply to the commercial use of parks and protected areas?
- Can you explain how Interest groups (bike clubs, tour operators) have the ability to create power imbalances and entitlement?
- What are the biggest challenges for managing land that is on unceded territory?
- What are the biggest challenges for rural land use managers?
- Can recreation/Mountain biking complicate the assertion of Indigenous rights and title?

**\*ADVENTURE TOURISM POLICY QUESTION\***

- Is the consultation process within the AT Policy effective? (other businesses, communities and Indigenous groups)
- Describe how mountain biking trail development can constrain/enhance relationships with Indigenous groups?
- Please comment on your thoughts of the following statement: Does the provincial Adventure Tourism Policy application and process debunk or

reinforce colonialism?

**\*INDUSTRY QUESTIONS\***

- Describe your experience consulting/negotiating/engaging with private industry?
  - Describe what corporate social responsibility means to you?
- What does Social License/Social Acceptance mean to you?

**GENERAL**

- What types of strategies/plans/best practices do you think need to be established for mountain bike tourism operators?
- Open Discussion

**COVID**

- Please summarize based on our conversation:
  - How is COVID changing your approach or development in your community?

**\*Below are key words to stimulate the conversation\***

- Partnerships
- Resource Allocation
- CERIP funding
- Is MTB tourism benefactor due to COVID or fires
- Relationships
- Community planning

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