

Working in a Good Way

A best practices guide for engaging and working with Indigenous Peoples on trails and outdoor recreation projects in British Columbia.



Outdoor Recreation
Council of BC

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Supported by the British Columbia Provincial Trails Advisory Body



Introduction

This best practices guide has been prepared for the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia (ORC) with the support of the British Columbia Provincial Trails Advisory Body. It is intended for the guidance of members of outdoor recreation groups and clubs who wish to work cooperatively with Indigenous communities when they are involved with projects in or adjacent to their communities and on the lands associated with those communities.

About the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia

Founded in 1976, ORC has the following objectives:

- To promote the benefits of public outdoor recreation in British Columbia.
- To represent the interests of the outdoor recreation community to government, industry and the public.
- To advocate for and facilitate access to public lands and waters for outdoor recreation.
- To foster responsible use of British Columbia's outdoors by recreational users through advocacy and education.
- To be a forum for the exchange of views between government, outdoor recreation groups and other organizations in matters related to outdoor recreation.
- To build bridges between outdoor recreation groups.

Any influence which ORC is able to exercise relies on its strong membership, which includes the leading provincial organizations for virtually all significant forms of outdoor recreation as well as a number of regional trail groups. ORC is also a partner with Recreation Sites and Trails BC in the administration of the Provincial Trails Advisory Body, the mandate of which is to advise the Government of British Columbia on implementation of the Trails Strategy for BC.



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Overview

Indigenous people have lived in the area now known as BC for more than 10,000 years. They developed their own societies, cultures, territories and laws. When European explorers and settlers first came to B.C. in the mid-18th century, the province was home to thousands of Indigenous people.

Today, there are approximately 200,000 Indigenous people in British Columbia. They include First Nations, Inuit and Métis. There are 198 distinct First Nations in B.C., each with their own unique traditions and history. More than 30 different First Nation languages and close to 60 dialects are spoken in the province.



Working in “A good way”

Indigenous communities place a high priority on doing things and making decisions in ‘a good way’. It means ensuring that all community initiatives are undertaken with a strong focus on process, prioritizing inclusivity, equality, honesty, protecting and enhancing the natural world and ensuring cultural survival for their people.

ORC acknowledges that it is critical that we all work towards and foster authentic reconciliation and build healthy relationships with the Indigenous peoples who have been living on the land since time immemorial. Doing so will ensure the long-term sustainability of the trails and activities we love, and that these activities are undertaken in “a good way”. This guide is intended to provide guidance and best practises to support this vision.

Begin with research to enhance awareness and understanding

One of the most critical first steps towards reconciliation is to educate ourselves about the history, culture, and issues around Indigenous peoples in Canada. Though many Indigenous people are willing to discuss and share their experiences when approached in a respectful and open manner, it is important to recognize it is not their responsibility to educate non-First Nation people. Taking the time to research and understand First Nations shows a willingness to learn and put in the work. There are many resources available. Here are a few suggestions for learning what is important:

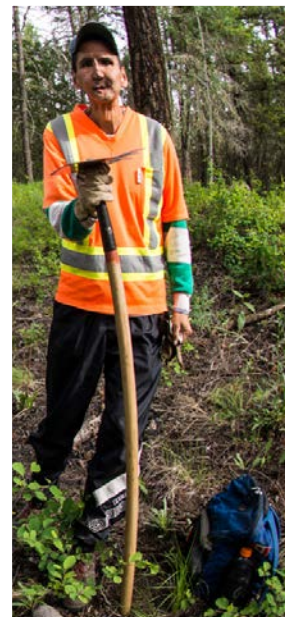
- Understanding and acknowledging the historical impacts of trails and recreation on First Nation communities is critical. Many parks and recreation areas have been created without the consent of Indigenous people and from which they have received little benefit. Many First Nation communities may feel reluctant to participate in such projects unless they feel comfortable and certain they won't further contribute to this painful legacy.



- Read the *Truth & Reconciliation Commission Summary Report*.
http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf
This provides a substantial background and history on the history of contact and interactions between First Nation and non-First Nation Canadians and the legacy and impacts of the residential school system.
- Familiarize yourself with local and regional First Nation communities and councils. Most First Nation communities have websites and information online about their history, culture, language, their territories, and ongoing initiatives. This can provide a solid understanding of the Nation's current vision and priorities.

There are many other resources online including the following:

- *Tips for Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples*® by Bob Joseph
<https://www.ictinc.ca>
- *Map showing location of First Nations communities in BC*
<https://apps.gov.bc.ca/pub/dmf-viewer/?siteid=5228028621212382210>
- *Consulting with First Nations - A BC Government Guide*
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations>
- *How Canadian governments interact with First Nations. Both the Government of Canada and the BC Government have adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf





A suggested approach for engaging with and building relationships with First Nations

Be proactive – Go to them

Engage with and prioritize building relationships with First Nations as a foundational aspect of your organization. Relationships take time to build and don't always adhere to construction schedules or deadlines. Building a healthy relationship without the expectation of something in return, builds trust and will assist you in understanding their needs and priorities and ensure that trails and recreation projects will align with their needs and have a better chance of success. Engage early and consistently – the first time a First Nation community learns about a trail project should not be through an article in the local newspaper!

Seek guidance

Seeking representatives from indigenous communities to participate on boards can be an excellent option for including different perspectives and ensuring respectful and inclusive clubs or organizations. However, many First Nation people may feel some reluctance in speaking for an entire community or communities or being the 'token' First Nation person. Instead of seeking a single individual to fulfill this role, an alternative can be to approach several people, including elders and people who are knowledgeable and can provide ongoing guidance.

Be patient

First Nation communities are often beset with an overwhelming volume of requests for their time and consideration. They are expected to attend numerous meetings and consultations for a broad range of issues impacting their communities and territories. Extending invitations to meet with First Nation leaders or representatives is important, however patience and consideration for their busy schedules is critical. Lack of attendance or participation in meetings does not necessarily indicate disinterest or should not be interpreted as meaning engagement is not required.

Communications

Think about the best way to communicate. Remember that e-mail is not always the most effective method because e-mails may not be responded to when they get overlooked. Consider telephoning or visiting in person instead.





Listen twice, speak once

Listening is critical for building relationships with First Nation communities. It can be very tempting to start talking to fill uncomfortable silences, but it is within these moments that good relationships form. Remaining quiet and providing opportunities for First Nation people to open up and share their feelings or perspective demonstrates respect and commitment towards building healthy relationships.

Ask questions

Don't be afraid to ask questions about cultural protocols and the most effective way to engage with the community. When inquiries are put forth in an open and honest manner, many communities are willing to provide answers and explain the best manner and approach for engaging with the community.

Be visual when presenting information

Indigenous knowledge is not written down and shelf ready. It always has been and still is an oral culture. Present ideas and new programs with visual aids such as photos and even scaled models. Provide context for what it is you are developing. For example, there is no way to teach someone how to ride a bicycle without context and hands-on practise. No amount of reading can substitute the steps of acquiring a bike, learning about its parts and getting on it.

Attend community events that are open to the public such as Pow Wows, lunches and Indigenous Day

Reach out to local First Nations and Councils and offer to host events and dinners, film nights, etc. (See *Tips for Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples* for examples of behaviour and etiquette).

Acknowledge Indigenous "Rights and Title"

For many First Nations, a primary motivator is cultural survival and asserting First Nation rights, title and their role as the caretakers and stewards of their lands¹. Indigenous Rights and Title are recognized and affirmed in the Canadian Constitution and form the basis for the relationship between First Nation and non-First Nation communities.

Indigenous Foundations, an information resource portal developed by the University of British Columbia defines and describes Indigenous title as follows:

Aboriginal title refers to the inherent Aboriginal right to land or a territory. The Canadian legal system recognizes Aboriginal title as a unique collective right to the use of and jurisdiction over a group's ancestral territories. Aboriginal land claims can involve both the right to the use of lands (e.g. the right to hunt and trap) or an Indigenous title to the land. This right is not granted from an external source but is the result of Aboriginal peoples' own occupation and relationship with their territories as well as their ongoing social structures and political and legal systems.²

1 Bob Joseph, *Tips for Working Effectively with Aboriginal Peoples*

2 Indigenous Foundations http://indigenousfoundations.web.arts.ubc.ca/aboriginal_title/



Over the past several decades there have been a significant number of court decisions that support this definition and form the basis for the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and governments.

Acknowledging Indigenous Rights and Title with respect to those territories where you live and play, in your correspondence, trail signage, and in your meetings and events, can be a powerful way for expressing these sentiments and showing a commitment to building relationships built on respect for local First Nations.

Meeting in the middle, building bridges

A new generation of Indigenous leaders is growing. Stereotypes are being broken down, values and worldviews are changing, inter-generational experiences form the foundation of new Indigenous and Non-Indigenous relationships. Acknowledging this change can go a long way in trust- and relationship-building if we are reaching out and building bridges.

Giving gifts

Giving appropriate gifts can be an important way of signaling good intent in building relationships. However, it is important to understand that the gifts are symbolic and must be followed by proper action. For non-Indigenous people, being present and showing a commitment to listening, maintaining commitments, keeping promises and building trust should be the priority. Building relationships with people from the communities and asking for guidance on when to offer appropriate gifts, is highly recommended.

Direct social and economic benefits to First Nation communities

Once a relationship has been developed, and trail and recreation projects are being developed, it is important to work with First Nation communities to ensure the social and economic benefits of those projects flow to their communities. This can include ensuring trails connect and serve the needs of First Nation communities, connecting community businesses to tourism opportunities such as campgrounds, restaurants, and stores, and ensuring construction and maintenance employment opportunities for community members, etc.

Be sensitive to traditional practises and cultural areas

A central priority for many First Nation communities is cultural survival and protecting traditional practises and sensitive areas. This can include a broad diversity of sites including archeological, ceremonies, areas important for gathering and harvesting foods and materials for traditional practises including arts and crafts, as well as hunting. Disruption or damage to these areas can have a significantly negative impact for First Nation communities. Working closely with First Nation communities and showing a commitment to respecting and protecting these areas is critical for building trusting relationships and sustainable trails.





Understand the importance of family and family structures

Family has long been identified as a key to wellness in Indigenous communities. First Nation youth especially feel they are able to connect and communicate with family members and extended relatives. One must recognize the importance of family and include examples of how the entire family can benefit from programs and initiatives.

Place names and labels

First Nations have named all the geographic features and places within their territories since time immemorial. Restoring these names are an important part of reconciliation. Working with First Nation communities to provide place names and labels to trails, rivers, sensitive areas, mountains can be a good way of acknowledging Indigenous Rights and Title. Naming and using indigenous languages should be done with great care and only with the consent and direction of the First Nation in whose territories a project is occurring.

Accept and respect “No” for an answer

There may be times, when a First Nation community may decide that a proposed trail or recreation development is not in the best interests of their community and choose to withhold their consent. It can be tempting to continue pursuing the issue in the hopes convincing leadership or receiving a different response. This approach can lead to frustration and erode trust. By listening to First Nation communities and showing a commitment to respecting their choices and direction for the land, we can build long-term, healthy relationships built on mutual trust that could lead to new and exciting opportunities in the future.

Maintaining Relationships & Accountability

Building and engaging with First Nation communities and people should not be a one-time or short-term event that ends once approval or consent for a particular trail or objective has been met. It is important to continue engaging and reporting back to First Nation partners on progress and developments.

Examples of Best Practices

Aboriginal Youth Mountain Bike Program <https://www.facebook.com/BCAboriginal-YouthMountainBikingProject/> – this program was started by a group of mountain bike and trails enthusiasts who wanted to share their love of riding and trails with First Nations youth. The program has become a means for assisting First Nation communities to develop trails, reconnect youth with the land, and assert their indigenous rights & title.





Creating Understanding through Trails – The Shuswap Trails Alliance (<http://www.shuswaptrailalliance.com/>) has been a significant leader in developing trails and recreation throughout Shuswap watershed. In developing their trail strategy, the Alliance made a significant effort to engage the Secwepemc peoples on whose lands they live and play. This led to the creation of a **Memorandum of Understanding** ([http://www.shuswaptrailalliance.com/userfiles/file/Shuswap%20Trails%20Round table%20-%20letter%20of%20understanding.pdf](http://www.shuswaptrailalliance.com/userfiles/file/Shuswap%20Trails%20Round%20table%20-%20letter%20of%20understanding.pdf)) that outlines the roles and expectations for the development of trails and recreation on Secwepemc territories and provides guidance on communications, information sharing as well as addressing and resolving disputes that centers the Secwepemc peoples.

Allies on Bike & Trails – The Cariboo Chilcotin region is renowned around the world for high quality trails and recreational opportunities. The **Cariboo Mountain Bike Consortium** (<http://ridethecariboo.ca/>) and the **Williams Lake Cycling Club** (<https://www.facebook.com/williamslakecyclingclub/>), have worked over a period of decades to reach out, engage and build meaningful relationships with the Tsilhqot'in and Secwepemc Nations based on mutual trust and respect. This involved visiting communities hosting riding clinics, repairing bikes, and building trails all done with respect and acknowledgement of Indigenous Rights & Title.

Acknowledging Traditional Territories – Squamish is known as the Outdoor Recreation Capital of Canada. Working with the Skwxwu7mesh Uxwumixw Squamish Nation, the Squamish Off Road Cycling Association endeavored to have all trail signs throughout the Nation's territories acknowledge and encourage visitors to respect the natural landscape.

Trails to Indigenous Rights & Title – the Simpcw First Nation, a Secwepemc Nation whose territories expand from north of the City of Kamloops through the Thompson River valley to the Village of McBride, Jasper, and the headwaters of the Fraser River, are a proud trails and mountain bike nation. Working with the **Western Canada Mountain Bike Tourism Association** (<https://www.mbta.ca/>) the Simpcw First Nation developed a **plan to support trails and recreation** (<https://www.facebook.com/simpcwmountainbiking/>) throughout their territories in a manner that reflects and supports their role as the caretakers and stewards of their territories. The Nation launched their own trail building company which now travels throughout the region building and supporting trails and recreation.

