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Kelowna Capital News

Process for building dirt biking trails 'broken'



Dirt bike trails carved out of the grassland on Bald Range are visible from as far away as downtown Kelowna, but if the tourism ministry has its way, they'll be rehabilitated next year and the area fenced off.

Judie Steeves/Capital News

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Published: December 11, 2009 11:00 PM

Updated: December 14, 2009 12:16 PM

There's a battle raging in the Bear (Lambly) Creek watershed on the Westside, according to two directors with the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council, a technical advisory body to the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

Bob Hrasko, manager of the Black Mountain Irrigation District and Toby Pike, manager of the South East Kelowna Irrigation District told council members the trails being built for dirt biking in that area don't show a lot of respect for the fact it is a domestic watershed.

Pike noted the draft trails strategy released by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts last spring to guide the ministry in its recreational trails management also gave short shrift to water quality issues.

Hrasko said the process that involves a variety of stakeholders in a project to built new, sustainable dirt biking trails in the recreational management zone for motorized use on the Westside, is "broken."

"Trail riders are doing whatever they please. They are building bridges where they aren't supposed to be and they're damaging riparian areas," he said.

The consultant that's been hired to design a trail network in the area is from the U.S. and is not respecting the riparian setbacks required here in B. C., he added.

Bikers are also riding through Bald Range Creek above the Lakeview Irrigation District's water intake, he said.

“There’s lots of pressure on the backcountry now. We can’t eliminate trail riders but they must be responsible. Political pressure will be required,” he said.

Council director Lorraine Bennest commented, “I’d be charged if I built a trail across the creek. Why aren’t they?”

Fellow director Steve Matthews, head of the fish and wildlife section in Penticton, said normally there would be a response from the environment ministry to something like that, but there are huge changes going on across government, in how it does business.

It will be leaner and meaner before the changes are complete, he added.

However, John Glaspie, district recreational officer for the MOTCA, said although the bridge in question wasn’t put in where the LID wanted it to go, it’s still a couple of kilometres up from the intake. It could not go in further upstream because the trail leading to it would have been too steep and maintenance would have been very high, he explained.

All the trails are currently blocked off by barbed wire fencing to prevent use by dirt bike riders until they’re complete and open next spring.

Access in and out of the bridge crossing will be governed by fencing to keep riders in a corridor so they can only cross the bridge, to get from one side of Bald Range Creek to the other, with no riding in-stream, he said.

Historically, riders have used an old industrial ford of the creek upstream, but that’s being rehabilitated now, he said.

Right now 10 displaced forest workers have been hired on a job program by Drake Forestry of Westbank to build fencing around Bald Range to prevent continued use of that grassland by trail riders and it will be rehabilitated as well, he said.

In all, 27 kilometres of old trails were deactivated this summer and rehabilitated, he added.

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