



Trailblazing the

MORE THAN A WALK IN THE PARK



THE KIERAN REPORT
with BRIAN KIERAN

If you put an assortment of Vancouver Island and coastal mayors in a room, sprinkle in a few provincial appointees, spice with a \$50 million endowment . . . what do you get?

A recipe for chaos?

Not in the case of the Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET). And not when this collection of civic and provincial leaders share an uncommon singularity of purpose . . . to improve the collective economic

wellbeing of their communities and put central and northern Vancouver Island and neighbouring coastal communities on the world stage as “go to” destinations.

ICET is helping Tourism Vancouver Island develop an integrated signage and marketing strategy to promote

Vancouver Island’s beautiful trail systems.

Phil Kent, ICET chair and Duncan mayor, says: “Vancouver Island is known for its abundant natural beauty and ease of access to the outdoors. It just makes sense to support an initiative that will take our amazing trail systems to the next level and market them internationally. The related economic benefits from a project like this will undoubtedly have a positive impact on Vancouver Island communities.”

The Vancouver Island Trails Strategy Project is being supported by an ICET contribution of \$30,000 and a matching \$30,000 investment from community members, municipalities and stakeholders.

ICET CEO Line Robert says one of the project’s most important components will be the creation of a uniform trail difficulty rating system similar to that used by North American ski areas. She is confident this new system will be a leading edge, user friendly rating tool and will be adopted in other parts of BC and Canada.

Robert believes hiking trails will soon be as big an international tourism draw as BC’s ski resorts have been in the recent decades. The development of these trails has already received substantial ICET investment including improvements to the Wild Pacific, North Coast, Sunshine Coast, Cowichan and Alberni Inlet trails as well as funding to restore the Kinsol Trestle.

“BC has the potential to be a world leader in trail development and classification, and Vancouver Island is ahead of the curve. The Wild Pacific Trail at Ucluelet was voted the number one tourism attraction on all Vancouver Island by tripadvisor.ca. That’s users rating the trail. Ucluelet has become a tourist destination in its own right,” Robert says.

Phase one of the Vancouver Island Trails Strategy Project will include working collaboratively with communities to research





Island

Photos courtesy of the Island Coastal Economic Trust. Clockwise from top left, Kinsol Trestle, Wild Pacific Trail, forested trail on Vancouver Island and Runners Trail.



trails and develop an inventory to determine the top 100 hiking trails with the highest potential for marketability, assess their stage of development, determine their best use and identify any improvements needed.

Phase two of the project will expand the trail inventory and develop strategies for consistent mapping, trail rating, signage and interpretation, best practices, consistent messaging and effective marketing.

Phase three puts the strategies into action by creating consistent signage and interpretive information, and easy-to-use maps available both on a dedicated website and in print at tourism offices, visitor information centres and anywhere community and tourist information is provided.

Tourism Vancouver Island President and CEO Dave Petryk says: "Vancouver Island is already rated the top island destination in Canada and in the continental US, and providing an integrated trails resource will definitely add to our appeal as a destination. Developing a comprehensive trails strategy will contribute to the economic and social potential of our communities and I am

excited to see it get underway."

In 2013 the Trust also dedicated funding of \$325,000 for construction of Campbell River's Elk Falls Suspension Bridge, viewing platforms and access trail. The 90-metre suspension bridge will be 72 metres above the bottom of Elk Falls Canyon, making it the highest pedestrian only suspension bridge in Canada.

ICET's \$50 million endowment was established in 2006 by the provincial

government to help diversify the economies of central and northern Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast. To date it has approved \$47 million for more than 100 economic infrastructure and economic development readiness projects. Its investments have leveraged more than \$260 million in incremental funding into the region, generated 2,500 person years of construction employment and helped create more than 2,100 post project jobs. 



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