

August 21, 2017

NEW BACKCOUNTRY SHELTER IN STRATHCONA PARK HIGHLIGHTS PARK HISTORY

COURTENAY – A permanent group shelter at Croteau Lake in Strathcona Provincial Park will provide safe, dry, versatile activity space for larger groups and will complement a newly built group site, thanks to a \$30,000 grant from the Island Coastal Economic Trust.

The facility will be a hard-sided yurt with a metal roof to accommodate the park's heavy winter snow loads, and will be large enough to provide shelter for group activities of up to 25 people (it is not planned as accommodation at this time). The \$61,000 project is being developed by the Strathcona Wilderness Institute, with support from BC Parks, Nyrstar Mine, and other community donors.

"Hiking - particularly into the backcountry - is a growing tourism market, and this yurt will make it easier and safer for groups and newer hikers to access the spectacular mountains, valleys, and lakes in this part of Strathcona Provincial Park," said Judy Norbury, Strathcona Wilderness Institute Society Chair.

Data collected by the SWI over the past three years shows that more than one-third of visitors to the park's Paradise Meadows Trailhead were from outside the Vancouver Island region, and those numbers are consistent with statistics from BC Parks, the Alpine Club of Canada, and other backcountry operators.

The group shelter, which complements the soon to be built group campsite at Croteau Lake, will help to increase the number of out-of-region visitors choosing Strathcona Park for part or all of their trip. Incremental benefits will include longer stays for visitors, more visitor spending on supplies, accommodations, food, equipment, and other goods and services.

"This backcountry facility will be used by overnight groups on longer trips, as well as by day-hikers and other groups making the relatively-easy two hour hike from the Vancouver Island Mountain Centre at Mt. Washington," said ICET Chair Phil Kent.

Providing a versatile, permanent shelter in close proximity to the trailhead, broadens the appeal and accessibility to hikers who previously might not have ventured into the backcountry. The reservable site can also be used by a wide range of people - school and community groups, outdoor education programs, retreats, and more.

The site was chosen due to its historic use as a lodge and campsite by Eugene Croteau in the early years of Strathcona Park. Interpretive signage will tell the story of the fascinating entrepreneur and pioneer and renew the link to the past.

In 1930, the Comox Valley resident established a guest lodge up on Forbidden Plateau at Croteau Lake. Initially, Croteau's camp consisted of a tent and a horse stable but he soon built a log dining room cabin where for many years he entertained a variety of guests from all over the world. Croteau's camp consisted of the main cabin and six tents with wooden floors for the guests. Charges were modest: in 1935 the cost was \$3.75 including meals and linen on the bed. The cost for saddle horses was \$2.50 per day and packing rates for baggage was five cents per pound. The lodge was operated until 1942. Eugene Croteau died in April 1952, at the age of ninety when, as the newspaper stated: "Mr. Eugene Croteau came to the end of the trail."

Construction of the group site and shelter will begin this Fall, with the facility expected to be in use by Spring 2018.

About the Island Coastal Economic Trust

Created by the Province of BC in 2006, the Island Coastal Economic Trust is celebrating its tenth year of investment in economic diversification, planning and regional revitalization.

ICET is independently governed by a Board of Directors and two Regional Advisory Committees which include more than 50 locally elected officials, MLAs and appointees from the Island and Coast. This exceptional team of leaders collaborate to set regional priorities and build vital multi-regional networks.

Through a community-centred decision-making process, ICET has approved more than \$49 million for over 170 economic infrastructure and economic development readiness projects. ICET investments have leveraged over \$270 million in investment into the region creating more than 2500 construction phase jobs and 2600 long term permanent jobs.

A full overview of ICET can be found at www.islandcoastaltrust.ca.

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