

Dear Mayor and Council,

My name is Pegah Pourkarimi and I live in Squamish. I am the Executive Director of The Association of Whistler Area Residents for the Environment (AWARE) and I appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the RMOW's Parks and Valley Trail Strategy. As Whistler's environmental charity, we are committed to supporting long-term community planning that protects the natural assets on which both our ecological integrity and tourism-based economy depend.

We commend the RMOW for undertaking a comprehensive review of the parks and trail network and strongly encourage a strategy that upholds environmental values, promotes fiscally responsible planning and implementation, and integrates Natural Asset Management into both the design and maintenance phases. By recognizing the services provided by ecosystems, such as water filtration, carbon storage, habitat provision, and climate adaptation, Whistler can manage its parks and trail system in a way that both enhances recreational opportunities and sustains the ecological functions that underpin community health and resilience.

AWARE supports a Parks and Valley Trail Strategy that will:

1. **Prioritize Ecology & Climate Resilience**

Community feedback shows strong support for preserving ecological integrity and mitigating climate impacts through sustainable park and trail design. AWARE emphasizes protecting sensitive habitats, like wetlands and wildlife corridors, by reducing hard surfaces, improving drainage, and enhancing native vegetation buffers.

2. **Re-invest in Aging Infrastructure**

Many parks, such as Rainbow, Meadow, and Alpha Lake, are facing outdated irrigation and drainage systems with visitor wear nearing or exceeding capacity. AWARE calls for upgrading these systems, including smart irrigation, improved trail resilience, and park facilities maintenance plans, to match current and future use.

3. **Enhance Connectivity & Accessibility**

Whistler's 416 km trail network is valued for recreation and mobility. AWARE supports closing key gaps (e.g. Alpha Lake–Creekside link), expanding active-transportation routes, and ensuring accessibility for all ages and abilities, including accessible surfaces, seating, signage, and multi-modal connections. This supports RMOW's Big Moves Strategy.

#### 4. Manage Capacity with Smart Access & Parking Policies

Survey results flagged crowding, parking pressure, and capacity issues at high-use parks. AWARE urges RMOW to adopt access management tools, such as paid parking in busy hotspots, shuttle services, seasonal limits, and improved transit options, to balance visitation needs and preserve parks' serenity.

#### 5. Center First Nations Stewardship & Community Engagement

The strategy's foundation on Truth and Reconciliation, and respect for Squamish and Lílwat Nations, reflects shared values. AWARE supports co-led planning, interpretive cultural features, and ecological stewardship rooted in Indigenous knowledge, ensuring trail and park development honors ancestral lands and ongoing relationships.

In summary, AWARE advocates for a Parks & Valley Trail Strategy that balances environmental stewardship, infrastructure renewal, accessible mobility, capacity management, and Indigenous leadership. We urge RMOW to elevate these priorities and invest boldly in a future-ready, resilient outdoor network that serves both community and ecosystem.

The Parks and Valley Trail network is a defining feature of Whistler. Thoughtful, ecosystem-first planning will ensure these assets continue to support community well-being and biodiversity into the future. AWARE looks forward to continued collaboration with the RMOW to ensure the strategy reflects strong environmental stewardship and long-term sustainability.

Sincerely,

Pegah Pourkarimi (She/Her)



Executive Director

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