



WHISTLER

REPORT | ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: September 15, 2020

REPORT: 20-090

FROM: Resort Experience

FILE: CPD20-01

SUBJECT: GEOPARK ICIP CCR INTAKE 2 GRANT APPLICATION

COMMENT/RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the General Manager of Resort Experience be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council authorize staff to submit an application to Intake 2 of the *Community, Culture, and Recreation* (“CCR”) component of the Canada-British Columbia *Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program* (“ICIP”) for a grant to create additional outdoor recreational space to – and adjacent to – four sites of geological significance (“geosites”) in Whistler; and further

That Council authorize a budget allocation over five years (2021-2025) for a total of \$229,385 in addition to the existing \$180,000 in RMI funds already budgeted during 2021-24 for geosite infrastructure and interpretation thereby enabling the Resort Municipality of Whistler (“RMOW”) to submit an application to ICIP CCR Intake 2 for a grant of \$1,125,615 to construct a new trail from the Sea to Sky Trail near Train Wreck to a geosite adjacent to Cheakamus Crossing and on to Loggers Lake forming a loop, plus viewing platforms, lawn areas (where feasible), and interpretation at four geosites in Whistler: Cheakamus Crossing lava escarpment, Loggers Lake volcanic crater, Cal-Cheak North basalt eskers, Cal-Cheak South lava-glacier-bedrock contact gorge.

REFERENCES

Link – ICIP CCR Intake 2 Program Guide <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/funding-engagement-permits/grants-funding/investing-in-canada/icip-community-culture-and-recreation-program-guide.pdf>

Appendix “A” – Locations of Whistler Geosites

Appendix “B” – Infrastructure and Interpretation Cost Estimates for Whistler Geosites

Appendix “C” – Photographs of Whistler Geosites

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This Report outlines an opportunity for the RMOW to attract a significant federal-provincial grant to provide additional outdoor recreational space and active transportation opportunities – trails, viewing platforms, interpretation – to contribute to greater dispersion, enhanced opportunities for physical and mental health, and lifelong learning for residents with the additional benefit of delivering a long-term natural asset to Whistler’s tourism product.

DISCUSSION

In recent months, there have been four significant developments which, individually and collectively, have heightened the importance of submitting an application to CCR Intake 2; specifically:

1. The pandemic created additional local and corridor demand, and has increasingly magnified a real need, for more outdoor recreational spaces:
 - Overcrowding in recreational areas including trails is increasingly frequent.
 - Congestion is exacerbated on trails with the same way in and out; e.g. Train Wreck.
 - Increased interconnectivity of existing assets and new trails with the added value of interpretation will entice people to disperse further afield.
 - Encouraging more active transportation – for example: hiking and biking – with more interconnectivity of trails is important for vehicular/traffic management and reducing associated climate impacts
2. Whistler's Official Community Plan ("OCP") was adopted.
3. The RMOW continues to advance the long-term corridor-wide opportunity of a Sea to Sky Geopark ("S2S Geopark").
 - The RMOW secured the rights to the trademark *Sea to Sky Fire & Ice Geopark*.
 - The Canadian Geopark Network (CGN) designated the S2S Geopark an 'Aspiring' Geopark.
 - CGN works with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) to assist Aspiring Geoparks in Canada achieve designation as a UNESCO Global Geopark.
 - Site surveys, geotechnical assessments, and infrastructure concepts have been completed for the four geosites in Whistler identified in the Recommendation of this Report.
 - A preliminary management and financial model for the S2S Geopark has been developed.
 - The S2S Geopark is included as a Key Action in Destination BC's Sea to Sky 10-Year Destination Development Strategy and Plan.
4. The RMOW's Senior Management Team has considered opportunities for this infrastructure grant and prioritized this project because it best supports current needs while contributing to long-term community resiliency.

This proposal is to construct a new trail from the Sea to Sky Trail near Train Wreck to a geosite adjacent to Cheakamus Crossing and on to Loggers Lake forming a loop, plus viewing platforms, lawn areas (where feasible), and interpretation at four geosites in Whistler: Cheakamus Crossing lava escarpment, Loggers Lake volcanic crater, Cal-Cheak North basalt eskers, Cal-Cheak South lava-glacier-bedrock contact gorge.

Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP)

ICIP is an overarching initiative which provides funding for capital projects through an agreement between Canada and British Columbia ("BC").

- ICIP encompasses several programs.
- The CCR program invests in projects that improve access to and/or increase quality of cultural, recreational and/or community infrastructure for Canadians.
- The BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing administers the CCR program.

On June 25, 2020 CCR Intake 2 was announced.

- Canada and BC are investing \$100million in CCR Intake 2 to support infrastructure projects in communities across BC.
- Local governments are eligible recipients of CCR Intake 2 funding.
- The deadline for applications is October 1, 2020
- The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing expects decisions will be announced by July 2021.
- Projects must be completed by March 31, 2026

Canada will contribute up to 40 per cent of the total cost of an approved project, and BC will contribute up to 33.33 per cent of the total cost of an approved project.

- The cost estimate for the proposed project proposed here is \$1,535,000
- Therefore, if the RMOW application is successful, contributions will be (up to):
 - Canada \$614,000 (over five years 2021-25)
 - BC \$511,615 (over five years 2021-25)
 - RMOW \$409,385 (over five years 2021-25; composed of \$229,385 identified in the
Recommendation + \$180,000 already budgeted during 2021-24)

In accordance with the ICIP CCR Intake 2 Program Guide (Section 6.2; page 21) the application must include a Council resolution endorsing the project.

The resolution will commit the proponent to contribute its share of eligible costs and potential overruns related to the project. The resolution must identify the source of the proponent's share of the project costs, and should show support for the project from Council.

The Sea to Sky Geopark Opportunity: a Refresher

1. A Geopark is a geographical area in which sites and landscapes of geological significance are managed with a commitment to sustainable development and promoted to:
 - ✓ Provide recreational space and enhanced outdoor areas by encouraging residents and visitors to actively experience them in every season through hiking, biking, skiing, etc.
 - ✓ Provide life-long learning educational opportunities.
 - ✓ Nurture community pride and sense of place.
 - ✓ Stimulate new revenue and job creation through geotourism.
2. Geoparks showcase an area's geology and landscape and the interconnectedness of geodiversity, biodiversity, and cultural identity.
 - ✓ 2015: the UNESCO Global Geopark designation was established.
 - ✓ 2020: 161 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 44 countries; 5 in Canada; 1 in BC (Tumbler Ridge)
 - ✓ UNESCO status does not restrict economic activity.
3. During 2017 an RMOW feasibility study identified ~60 sites of geosites in the Sea to Sky (S2S) region in an area encompassing ~2,500 km² from Bowen Island to Mt. Meager thus affirming the S2S region as a viable applicant for UNESCO designation.
 - ✓ The S2S region is one of the most geologically active areas in North America; a dynamic landscape in which the interplay of volcanism (Fire), glaciation (Ice), and plate tectonics has created some of the most unique landforms on Earth.
 - ✓ Many of the geosites are linked by the Sea to Sky Trail and/or adjacent to Highway 99.
4. The geosites within the envisioned S2S Geopark are located on land and/or operating under a variety of ownership and management models.

- ✓ Access and infrastructure at individual geosites will be the responsibility of the owners and/or tenure holders of those geosites.
 - ✓ Affiliation with the S2S Geopark will be an opt-in approach.
 - ✓ Owners and operators of individual geosites will determine if they wish to participate in and contribute to the S2S Geopark in return for benefits provided by the S2S Geopark.
5. The four geosites sites identified in this Report – the lava escarpment Cheakamus Crossing, the volcanic crater at Loggers Lake, the basalt eskers at Cal-Cheak North, and the lava-glacier-bedrock contact gorge at Cal-Cheak South – will serve as the nucleus and interpretive template from which the S2S Geopark will gradually evolve and expand throughout the S2S region.
 6. UNESCO criteria require that UNESCO Global Geoparks are governed by an organization representing all relevant stakeholders and authorities.
 - Therefore, prior to submitting an application to UNESCO, the S2S Geopark will establish a not-for-profit *Sea to Sky Fire & Ice Geopark Society* (“Society”) which will be responsible for submitting the application to UNESCO.
 7. The Society will be responsible for oversight of the S2S Geopark including but not limited to:
 - 1) Financial Planning and Management of the Society
 - 2) Guiding Principles
 - 3) Guidelines for use of the S2S Geopark logo and, eventually, the UNESCO logo
 - 4) Interpretation and Education
 - 5) Marketing and Communications Strategy and Plan
 - 6) Relationship Management with:
 - Owners and operators of geosites
 - Funders
 - Canadian Geopark Network and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO
 - The geoscience community: academic, public sector, private sector, not-for-profit

Timelines

1. ICIP CCR Intake 2
 - September 15: recommendation to Council
 - September 16-27: draft, refine, and finalize application
 - September 28: submit application
 - July 2021: decisions expected
2. Proposed additional and enhanced community outdoor recreational space
 - 2020:
 - Infrastructure: finalize site drawings; review geotechnical assessments
 - Interpretation: finalize interpretive strategy and design template; Digital Field Guide soft launch; confirm website architecture
 - 2021:
 - Infrastructure: begin installation at the four nucleus geosites in Whistler
 - Interpretation: expand content for Digital Field Guide, website, and on-site
 - S2S Geopark: work to finalize a long term Sea to Sky corridor management model and plan; initiate relationships with potential stakeholder/partners; develop Terms of Reference for collaboration with stakeholders including the *Howe Sound Biosphere Reserve*
 - 2022:
 - Infrastructure: ongoing installation

- Interpretation: ongoing content expansion
- S2S Geopark: draft UNESCO application to CGN and CCUNESCO for guidance 2023:
- Formally apply for designation as the *Sea to Sky Fire & Ice UNESCO Global Geopark*

OCP POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The infrastructure proposed in this Report – trails, viewing platforms, interpretation for four geosites in Whistler as the nucleus of a *Sea to Sky Fire & Ice Geopark* – is consistent with Whistler’s OCP and aligns with the OCP across several Chapters including, but not limited to:

OUR COMMUNITY VISION – PREAMBLE

- *We understand our fundamental dependence on the environment – for our health and well-being, and for the success of our tourism-based economy.*

VISION STATEMENT: *A place where our community thrives, nature is protected and guests are inspired* – and specifically relevant are the following Vision Characteristics:

2. LANDSCAPE: Natural areas are never far from sight and reach; they are the predominant component of our mountain landscape, core to our mountain culture and the basis of our outstanding recreation offerings.

5. RESPECT: We understand, respect and steward natural areas as the foundation of our community, our tourism-based economy and overall human health.

7. ACCESS: Where natural areas are accessed and enjoyed for recreation and overall wellbeing, we do so in a responsible way.

15. PARTNERSHIPS: We have established strong partnerships with the Squamish Nation, Lil’wat Nation, other levels of government and community stakeholders based on open dialogue, honesty, respect and collaboration, resulting in the achievement of mutual goals and shared benefits.

17. EXPERIENCE: Whistler offers diverse, year-round and authentic experiences that offer exceptional value and sustain visitation.

CHAPTER 6: ECONOMIC VIABILITY

6.1.1.3. POLICY Pursue and maximize senior government contributions in funding municipal infrastructure.

CHAPTER: 8 HEALTH, SAFETY AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING

8.1. GOAL Promote, encourage and support initiatives that strengthen the community’s sense of place and sense of belonging.

8.1.2. OBJECTIVE Promote and support connections to the natural environment.

8.1.2.1. POLICY Create and promote ways for all community members to have access to the natural environment.

8.8. GOAL Ensure Whistler is an inclusive and accessible resort community.

8.8.2. OBJECTIVE Create a positive resort experience for people of all ages and abilities.

CHAPTER 9 LEARNING, CULTURE AND RECREATION

9.3.2. OBJECTIVE Whistler’s recreation and leisure system contributes to the social wellbeing of residents and visitors.

9.3.2.1. POLICY Recognize that recreation and leisure provide opportunities for social interaction and add social value to our community, thus building upon our sense of belonging to this place.

9.5. GOAL Continue to maintain, improve and provide a diverse variety of high quality and affordable recreation and leisure amenities and experiences.

9.5.4. OBJECTIVE Ensure that recreational opportunities highlight Whistler's natural environment and cultural history.

OTHER POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed infrastructure is consistent with actions identified in the RMOW Corporate Plan, and in the Economic Partnership Initiative Economic Planning Report, and with the Goals and Objectives in the Whistler Task Force on Learning and Education report, and with the Goals, Strategies and Recommendations in the Recreation and Leisure Master Plan.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The cost estimate for the proposed project is \$1,535,000.

If the RMOW grant application to ICIP CCR Intake 2 is successful, contributions over five years (2021-25) from each party will be (up to):

- Canada \$614,000
- BC \$511,615
- RMOW \$409,385

The recommended RMOW commitment of \$409,385 is anticipated to be 100 per cent RMI funds; specifically: \$180,000 RMI already budgeted for Project A072 during 2021-24 in the RMOW Five-year Financial Plan plus the incremental of \$229,385 over the upcoming five years.

The RMOW's annual expenditure of anticipated RMI funds for the proposed project is estimated as:

- 2021 \$ 49,340
- 2022 \$237,363
- 2023 \$ 90,678
- 2024 \$ 17,336
- 2025 \$ 14,668

The RMOW's Resort Operations department is confident the proposed infrastructure can be managed and maintained with minimal impact on the Parks and Trails operating budget. To be eligible for ICIP CCR Intake 2 funding, the project identified in the grant application must not have issued tenders, and the applicant must demonstrate their share of funding has been secured.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

All infrastructure that will be included in the ICIP CCR Intake 2 grant application is located within RMOW boundaries. However, three of the four proposed geosites are located on Crown land and, therefore, are subject to a review process that will be conducted by the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development.

Letters of Support from Province of BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development - Recreational Sites and Trails, and from BC Parks have been requested and are expected to be included with the grant application.

Staff will undertake engagement with Lil'wat Nations and Squamish Nation for cultural considerations and content for interpretation.

Staff will also undertake engagement with stakeholders who are located at or near the geosites identified in this Report including commercial operators – e.g. Whistler Bungee, Whistler Aggregates – to consider coordinated efforts in implementation.

SUMMARY

The RMOW is an eligible applicant for ICIP CCR Intake 2 with the potential to attract a significant federal-provincial grant that will enable the RMOW to provide additional outdoor recreational space for the community, to contribute to greater dispersion, enhanced opportunities for physical and mental health, and lifelong learning for residents with the additional benefit of delivering a long-term natural asset to diversify Whistler's tourism product.

Applicant local governments must include a Council resolution indicating approval of the grant application.

Respectfully submitted,

John Rae
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for
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