

k'yuwaatl'aagee / k'yuwaatl'aagaay

The Haida Gwaii Trails Strategy

Misty Isles Economic Development Society

Interim Report for Stage 1

February 17th, 2011



Geiki Creek outlet into Tlell River. A stopping point on the 10 km return Pesuta Trail, Naikun Park

As an initiative of the Misty Isle Economic Development Society (MIEDS), with the generous support of the Skeena Queen Charlotte Regional District and the Real Estate Foundation of BC, *the path out of concealment / the woods* – k'yuwaatl'aagee - the Haida Gwaii Trails Strategy, was launched in November 2010. This new Islands initiative will create an Islands' Vision for sustainable trail use, maintenance, and management for all user groups on Haida Gwaii, based on past and current public and stakeholder engagement.

In the past 3 months since Stage 1 of the Haida Gwaii Trails Strategy (the Strategy) began, several processes took place that amended the work plan. While the Strategy received funding from 3 sources to begin its' proposed work, a proposal to the Gwaii Trust Society (GTS) was not approved, with reason given that they felt that a study like this had been done. In order to address this issue, towards the possibility of GTS¹ funding in future, an additional report was created to add to the Stage 1 deliverables on this project. **The Gap Analysis Report**² completed in December 2010, became the foundation document for Stage 1. This report provided a base from which to build the rest of the project in terms on not duplicating previous work, but rather building upon it. Though this was always the intent of the Strategy, the research done to create the Gap Analysis Report strengthens and provides additional focus to our planning.

¹ In the interest of simplicity, and due to these funds having joint administration, GTS will refer to the Gwaii Trust Society, the Gwaii Forest Society, the Gwaii Forest Charitable Trust, and the South Moresby Forest Replacement Account

² see Appendix 1: *k'yuwaatl'aagee Gap Analysis Report*, December 2, 2010.

Public and Stakeholder Consultation Process

A significant amount of consultation had taken place in the past regarding trails, as per the Gap Analysis report and documents referenced there in. The consultation process focused on particular aspects needed to assist in moving ahead with trail system management that would build on previous work. Questionnaires were created that addressed the gaps identified. Consultation with Recreational Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC), the Ministry of Environment, Old Massett Economic Development, the Mount Moresby Adventure Camp, the Tlell Watershed Society and additional documentary research³ helped to focus the questions.

The public consultation process was advertised in the *Haida Gwaii Observer* and *Northern View* newspapers for 2 weeks. In addition, an article describing the project was submitted to the *Observer*. Posters⁴ were installed at all of the Islands' Post offices, some village offices, and several public notice boards. The MIEDS website was used to introduce the project and provide the questionnaires to a variety of interests, including hikers, bicyclists, ATVers, and Horse riders.

Bicycling has a significant focus in this project and this was reflected by providing an interest specific e-mail notice to the "Derailers in the Mist" bicycling group, requesting their input to the process by completion of a bicyclists' questionnaire.

Educational use of trails was addressed through e-mail requests for input from all of the Islands' Schools and the Northwest Community College.

The stakeholder consultation process was different in terms of how notice was delivered. A list of governments, societies, and other trail-focused organizations was created and then each stakeholder was contacted by e-mail or telephone. Stakeholders were asked to take the time to provide input to the Strategy by completing the stakeholder questionnaire. A random sample of tourism operators, all terrain vehicle enthusiasts, horse riders and vendors were asked for input. Separate e-mail communications took place to answer questions about trail issues specific to each jurisdiction or group.

A report on the Public and Stakeholder Consultation Process for the Strategy will document the full scope and results of the process, and provide recommendations. This report will be available February 28, 2011.

Potential research projects that could engage Universities and attendant funding for trail system management and maintenance have not been a focus of the Stage 1 consultation process, due to time constraints. The intention is to continue to move forward on this when time permits. There is a significant possibility of funding for trail system management and maintenance through providing research opportunities. For example, the Mount Moresby Adventure Camp is working with the Haida Gwaii Higher Education Society to consider how they may work together to create educational opportunities related to trails, forestry, ecology and archaeology in the camp area. The MIEDS Trails Coordinator spent a field day with these groups at the Mount Moresby Adventure Camp in February. The day involved some trail maintenance, reviewing certain areas and ideas for educational opportunities, and discussing trail management on North Moresby Island.

Consultation on marketing Haida Gwaii trails in concert with other trail organizations in the Northwest has only been touched on and more work will be done on this aspect of consultation on trail system development as the project continues. Some brief discussions have taken place with the Village of Kitimaat and documentary research on trail networks in the northwest has begun. Hiking and mountain biking on trails has gained considerable popularity in the Northwest. A focus on advertising market-ready trails for the Northwest has the potential to increase tourism in the entire region.

A timely brochure is being created by the local Haida Gwaii offices of the Ministries of Environment

³ *The Sea to Sky Corridor Recreation Trail Strategy 2008*, the *North Moresby Island Trails Development Project, 2009*, the *Sunshine Coast Feasibility Study, 2000*.

⁴ Appendix 3: Media and Questionnaires for the Strategy's Consultation Process

and Natural Resource Operations, Recreational Sites and Trails Branch, for the upcoming tourist season and available to the public. This brochure will list the market-ready trails, but it will not list all of the trails that can be used safely on Haida Gwaii. It will bring some certainty to hikers, who may not use a trail if they are unsure of the level of maintenance and signage. Until we have an islands-wide strategy in place and can commit funds to trail system management and maintenance in general, this brochure will be helpful in getting people out on some trails and reducing perceived and real issues of liability associated with those trails.

An On-line Application called *Base camp* is being used to share information on the development of this project. Stakeholders have been asked if they are interested in participating by becoming members of the Haida Gwaii Trails Advisory Committee on *Base camp*. Some Stakeholders have expressed interest, and some have joined the committee. At this time, the application is being used to share documents created by the project and some reference documents. In addition, the interactive capacity of *Base camp* makes it easy for the Islands-wide Board of the Misty Isles Economic Development Society (MIEDS) to engage in the project as their time permits.

Field Studies, Consultation in the Field, Outreach and Education



One of the most engaging aspects of this project is the opportunity from time to time to review trails in the field. Prior to being awarded Real Estate Foundation funding, MIEDS Executive Director, the Real Estate Foundation (REF) Chief Executive Officer, Karin Kirkpatrick, MIEDS Trail Coordinator met in Skidegate to hike the Spirit Lake Trail and discuss the purpose of the project. As part of proposals for funding, field trips were indicated as a requirement to help ensure ongoing connection to the actual subject of the work. Within a couple of weeks of the hike with REF BC staff, MIEDS was awarded a \$5,000 grant from the Real Estate Foundation to assist us in completing the strategy.

In January, the MIEDS Trails Coordinator was invited to hike with two members of the “Over the Hill Hikers” Group (OHH), Fran Fowler and Maureen Weddell. The hike included a few of the trails that are used regularly in the Queen Charlotte area, including the Tarundl loop, which goes through magnificent second growth forests,

and the Charlie Hartie Creek Trail. There was discussion about the plans that this group has to manage their local trail system, and ideas were put forward on how this project could support their initiatives. It was encouraging to see the significant work being done by volunteers to keep these trails clear of blown down trees and other debris. OHH envisions a trail network that will connect existing routes behind Queen Charlotte, and refer to this network as “The Backyard Trail” These trails are both for locals in terms of healthy lifestyle choices, and tourists of any age.



*Maureen Weddell and Karen Church on Tarundl Loop Trail
photo: Fran Fowler*

Both Fran and Maureen had participated in a previous trail strategy project that had similar goals but unfortunately that project did not come to fruition. They suggested that one of the reasons that the MMAC Islands-wide Trails Strategy project of 2006-2007, funded by the South Moresby Forest

Replacement Account (now part of GTS) was not complete was that there had been no Terms of Reference developed. In response, a draft Terms of Reference⁵ was created for this project that would help to provide clear objectives and timelines in a succinct format.



East Beach view platform as it connects to Tow Hill Trail

Also in January, the Trail Coordinator had the opportunity to visit 3 of the most popular trails on the islands, the Pesuta Trail, Tow Hill, and Blow Hole trails. In the past 2 years, extensive work has been done to maintain and enhance these trails, including brand new board walks for Tow Hill and Blow Hole, and a new bridge over Geiki Creek on the Pesuta trail. These trails may be the best examples of what a well managed trail should look like on Haida Gwaii.

In February a trip to the Mount Moresby Adventure Camp (MMAC) took place with Traci Murphy, Executive Director of the MMAC, and representatives of the Haida Gwaii Higher Education Society. We are planning to review the MMAC trail initiatives, discuss forestry,

ecology and archaeology as relates to programs that the Higher Education Society may assist in offering in the future at the MMAC. We also expect to do some trail maintenance and discuss how an islands-wide trail strategy can best assist in trail initiatives in this area.

Another field-based project that Stage 1 of the Strategy will help support is an educational field trip to field trip for George M. Dawson High School students this coming June. Use of trails in the area will be discussed, and a field orienteering session will be part of this 1.5 hour field excursion. This project will be the subject of power point assisted presentation for school use as well as conference presentation.

Field trips with off-island groups from the Northwest and beyond, including the Trans Canada Trails organization, should be conducted if possible during the next stage of this project to network with regional groups towards increasing regional tourism and to see how their trails are being managed and developed.

Funding Search

We are actively seeking funding for the next stage of this project.

Final Report prepared by March 31, 2011:

Next Steps towards a Trails Strategy for Haida Gwaii

The format of the final report will be similar to formats for previous studies of this kind, though with local variation as required. Examples of the scope of the report envisioned are the Sea to Sky Corridor Recreation Trail Strategy, 2008, and some aspects of the Feasibility Study and Business Plan for the Sunshine Coast Trail System, 2000. The Trails Strategy report is the final deliverable of Stage 1 of the Strategy, and will be complete by March 31, 2001.

⁵ Appendix 2: Haida Gwaii Trails Strategy Terms of Reference, Draft 2, February 8, 2011

Appendixes

1. Gap Analysis Report, Church, K., December 7, 2010
2. Terms of Reference, DRAFT 2, Church, K., T. Glasman, February 8, 2011
3. Media and Questionnaires for Consultation Process

Report Prepared by:

Karen Lovisa Church, BGS
Certificate in first Nations Language Proficiency

Researcher and Coordinator for k'yuwaatl'aagee /
k'yuwaatl'agaay, the Haida Gwaii Trails Strategy

