

FRIENDS OF TOURISM SUBMISSION
ALBERTA TRAILNET SOCIETY: Northeast Alberta Trail Map Project

Objective:

There are few maps of recreational trails in Alberta outside the mountain parks. The overall purpose of this initiative is to map Alberta's recreational trails and adjacent natural/tourism attractions for those who want to maximize their trail experiences. Other benefits of having these maps will be to: identify and inventory approved trails and areas with recreational values; better understand recreational needs and interests; facilitate future land management and recreational access planning; promote and support trail stewardship, responsible use and user safety; and protect and minimize recreational impacts. The need for recreational trail maps arose from consultation with government and other stakeholders as part of the Alberta Recreation Corridors Initiative. Those involved in the stakeholder consultations and subsequent recommendations identified the need for provincial maps that would include: trail locations and supporting services such as campgrounds; approved uses to help cyclists, ATV users, snowmobilers, hikers, equestrians, skiers and other users know which trails support their chosen activity; tourism/information products and related interpretive themes along specific trails; contact information to help the user access specific details of a trail and its immediate surroundings; and written and pictorial formats. The Northeast Alberta Trail Map was developed in 2006 and 2007 and is the first in a desired series of provincial trail maps. Northeast Alberta was chosen as the pilot region because of its diverse land base, the commitment to trails demonstrated by its municipalities, the variety of trails accommodating a range of recreational users, and its heritage as a major route for explorers and pioneers. The initiative was led by Alberta TrailNet Society in partnership

with Alberta Community Development, Alberta Economic Development (now Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation), Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association; and the Alberta Snowmobile Association. Each organization had representation on the NE Alberta Pilot Map Project Steering Committee, and contributed human, financial and in-kind resources to the project. Alberta TrailNet is a charitable non-profit society dedicated to promoting the development of a provincial network of shared use trails and the Alberta portion of the Trans-Canada Trail. Alberta TrailNet partners with provincial trail user associations, municipalities and community groups to develop and promote safe, responsible recreational access. For details, go to www.albertatrailnet.com.

Research:

Phase 1: Study Organization - establish the steering committee; identify other potential partners and participant opportunities; confirm the pilot study area and mapping requirements; estimate costs and developing a budget; engage project consultants; develop a communications plan

Phase 2: Survey of Existing Trail Information - communicate with land managers, municipalities, trail operators, business owners, tourism organizations and other stakeholders in the study area to secure assistance in gathering existing trail information; identify types of existing data sources; develop an inventory of existing maps of trails in the project area; identify defined trails of local and regional importance; identify and report on additional inventory requirements or opportunities

Phase 3: Data Acquisition & Processing (GIS) - acquire the additional inventory by: consulting with government staff and local and regional stakeholders to compile an

inventory of interpretive themes and tourism/recreation products along the trail;
conducting a detailed field inventory of defined and potential trails; photographing
inventoried areas; producing a report (map data base)

Phase 4: Interpretive Map Theme & Resource Inventory - gather information from
identified stakeholders; conduct field research of existing municipal trail systems,
cultural and historical sites, recreational activities, wildlife viewing, parks and protected
areas, agri-tourism facilities and services, special events, campgrounds, and Aboriginal
events and tourism; contact Tourism Destination Regions, local Visitor Information
Centres, and municipal tourism organizations to gather tourism related information

Phase 5: Produce & Field Test Preliminary Interpretive/Navigational Map - coordinate
production of navigational and interpretive sides of map; test market preliminary map
with target stakeholders

Phase 6: Print and distribute final map - collect feedback; initiate planning for next
regions to be mapped

Execution:

Alberta TrailNet served as lead organization in this partnership project and accepted
the management, administrative, financial and contractual responsibilities for the project.
TrailNet's Executive Director Linda Strong-Watson chaired the NE Alberta Pilot Map
Project Steering Committee and contracted the consultants needed to fulfill the project
plan. The steering committee, comprising representatives of the pilot project's six partner
organizations, met frequently and made decisions by consensus. Contractors fulfilled the
various stages of the work as documented in the research section. Committee members
assisted with stakeholder consultations, including a public open house to solicit input to

the final review and edit of the map. Regional government staff participated on the steering committee, contributing their land base knowledge, GIS and other expertise to the project. Provincial trail user associations sought input and help in acquiring trail data from their local clubs. Regional tourism association representatives provided information and photos, and helped ensure that the map was as complete and correct as possible.

Following the collection of data and maps, TrailNet coordinated the writing, design and printing of the map and interpretive information (*appendix # 1 - map*). Distribution of the maps is shared by all partners, and includes handouts at recreation, tourism and other trade shows and conferences; provincial, regional and municipal tourism information centers; provincial and federal parks in or near the region; and other sites. Sites that were closed in winter received copies of the map in the spring, and information about the map was posted on the Alberta TrailNet and Travel Alberta websites with links on all partner websites. The Tourism Development Branch worked with Travel Alberta to load and host the map on the Travel Alberta website for visitors to view and download. TrailNet's communications consultant and communications specialists from the provincial government developed and executed a communications plan to create awareness and interest in the new map. Communications centered on a public and media announcement planned in conjunction with a community event in the map region. The project team was able to piggy back on an Alberta's Iron Horse Trail event already being planned in St. Paul on Saturday, January 19, 2008, to honour that trail's founding members. The event included a community luncheon, a presentation on the history of the trail, plaque presentations to founding members, followed by the map launch and an outdoor event on the trail. TrailNet invited Valerie Pringle, Chair, Trans Canada Trail; Honourable Hector

Goudreau, Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture; and Honourable Ray Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, local MLA for Lac La Biche-St. Paul. The Alberta Snowmobile Association, a major project partner, rallied about 80 of its members for a snowmobile excursion on the trail. The operator of a local equine tourism business provided a horse-drawn sleigh ride and other participants chose to ski down the trail. Public invitations were issued by Alberta TrailNet and Alberta's Iron Horse Trail, and media invitations by the provincial government.

Results:

About 180 guests and six media reporters attended the event in St. Paul. Media attendance on site was higher than predicted and several Edmonton media made arrangements to access reports or television footage from those in attendance. There was also extensive media after the event in response to a joint media release distributed by government (*appendix # 2 - media release*). This media coverage (*appendix # 3 – media coverage*), combined with the partners' newsletters and websites (*appendix # 4 -TrailNet newsletter*), created widespread awareness of the initiative and the map. The momentum has continued with the distribution of the map at trade shows and tourism and park centers, mailings, continued presence on the web, and word-of-mouth. The first printing of 15,000 maps was distributed by the end of May with increasing demand and the summer season fueling the need for a reprint. Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation provided a grant for printing an additional 15,000 copies. Frequent requests from the public, tourism centers, municipalities and partner organizations continue to reduce the current map inventory. As of July 31, 2008, 25,000 NE Alberta Trail maps were distributed. The map has been well received by the public and has received praise from a

wide variety of sources (*appendix # 5 – endorsements*). The NE Alberta Trail Map project received the Alberta Snowmobile Association’s Snowmobile Excellence Award for Outstanding Promotion and Development of Snowmobiling in 2008. Government and project partners, Members of the Legislature and Alberta TrailNet have all received calls from other municipalities interested in being included in the next maps. As a result of this interest and the strong support and uptake on the NE Alberta Trail Map, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation has provided grant funding for the next three maps in the provincial trail map series. The provincial trail map steering committee is currently planning approaches for these new maps. The development and launch of the NE Alberta Trail Map created widespread awareness of recreational trails, historic sites and tourism related businesses in Northeast Alberta that will provide a lasting benefit for residents, businesses, recreationists and tourists. The map project also contributed to increased interest in using and developing recreational trails across the province, supporting Alberta TrailNet’s mandate. The map is also useful to businesses and industries involved in tourism, recreation, agri-tourism, hospitality and land use management. The NE Alberta Trail Map’s benefits will be felt for many years, and the success of its launch demonstrated both the public interest and the project partners’ ability to proceed with development of recreational trail maps for other regions. The partnership approach taken on this initiative proved that a public-private team is an effective and efficient mechanism to deliver a much needed public resource.