

**Report on**

**TWO SUCCESSFUL RURAL TRAILS**  
**The Iron Horse Trail**  
**Western Irrigation District (WID) Canal Pathway**

**Submitted to**

**The Alberta TrailNet Society**

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## INTRODUCTION

Alberta TrailNet is currently pursuing the Trans Canada Trail route alignment and official registration of the Trail through rural and urban areas of Alberta.

In general, rural Albertans view trails as urban amenities used primarily by urban users.

As rural trails become a more imminent reality, rural landowners are expressing increasing and widespread concern on issues related to occupiers' liability, policing, fencing, trespassing, dogs, vandalism, loss of privacy, noise, weed and litter control, fires, and ongoing trail maintenance. Rural support and involvement in resolving these issues will help guarantee the success of rural trails in Alberta.

There are numerous examples of successfully managed rural trails throughout North America that can contribute greatly to our understanding of good trail management. Rural Albertans believe, with some justification, that local situations and populations are unique. It is therefore both meaningful and desirable to document and communicate examples of successfully managed trails from within the physical and cultural landscape of Alberta. It is these 'closer to home' situations which are most likely to build some degree of comfort, not only with the potential for successfully managed and utilized trails within rural Alberta, but also with the kinds of problems that are likely to occur and the ability to respond to them successfully.

### **The Project**

To document and present a brief study of two successful rural trails, one utilizing an active irrigation canal alignment (Calgary to Chestermere Lake) and the other converted from an abandoned rail line (The Iron Horse Trail-Elk Point to Heinsburg).

### **Scope of Work**

Through consultation with local trail builders, managers, and landowners, prepare a brief history and report on these two trails including: who was/is responsible for conceiving, building and managing the trail; permitted uses; trail facilities; management policies; special features; and the role of the trail within local urban and rural communities.

Produce and implement a survey targeted at representative rural landowners living along or in proximity to the trail. The primary focus of this work is to identify positive rural trail experiences and trail champions within the surrounding rural communities. This survey will also identify:

- issues raised by rural landowners during the planning phase, including the ways in which these issues were addressed
- the degree to which the trail has met or exceeded the expectations of the rural landowners
- landowner perception of the trail's impact (personal, social, economic) and values accruing to the general community from the trail's operation.

- positive aspects of the trail and the ways in which it has been particularly successful
- landowner recommendations to trail planners and managers

Produce materials (photos, quotes, simple maps, text) that will be used to produce one page trail info sheets. These will communicate two positive rural Alberta trail experiences which demonstrate that rural trails can and do work to enhance the lives of those living along them.

# **The Iron Horse Trail**

## The Iron Horse Trail

**Type of Trail:** Abandoned CN rail line.

**Location:** Elk Point to Hinesburg (east central Alberta, 225 kilometres east of Edmonton). Trail alignment generally follows that of the North Saskatchewan River.

**Historical Perspective:** The Iron Horse Trail follows the historic Carlton Trail, first documented in the 1790's as a fur trade route. The Carlton Trail linked eastern and western Canada and has been referred to as the original Hudson Bay Trail, the Victoria Trail, the Winnipeg Trail and the Edmonton Trail. Missionaries (Father Lacombe, George McDougall) followed it in the 1860's and after them came the NWMP (1874) and the Northwest Rebellion (1885). Deep ruts left by Red River carts are still visible in some areas.

**Terrain:** Aspen Parkland. Pleasant rural scenery with rolling hills, lakes, ponds, sloughs, agricultural fields and woodlands interrupted by dense forest, deep gullies and views of the North Saskatchewan River.

**Access:** Broad trail with easy grade, however loose gravel and sand over a 2 kilometre stretch about half way between Elk Point and Lindbergh make walking difficult and bicycling impossible. Railway trestles have been removed creating obstructions; care is required when crossing ravines. There are a number of gates along the Trail (3+). Main trail access points are Elk Point, Lindbergh, Riverview, Hinesburg, Middle Creek, Simmo Lake.

**Signage:** Trail signage in place although more is required.

**Facilities:** Some parking available at trail access points. Small campsite with toilet, benches and fire pit recently completed at Middle Creek. Plans are in place to develop several other rest/camping spots along the trail (Lindbergh, Riverview and Muriel). Good camping facilities also available at Whitney Lake, and at the trailhead towns-Elk Point and Hinesburg.

**Points of Interest:** Fort George Buckingham House Interpretive Centre, Windsor Salt Works (Lindbergh), the Elk Point Pioneer Museum, historic Hinesburg, Whitney Lakes Provincial Park

**Trail Managers:** The Elk Point Historical Society, the Iron Horse Trail Committee and the County of St. Paul.

**Length:** 34 kilometres.

**Surface:** Gravel and dirt.

**Width of Trail:** 12 feet minimum.

**Permitted Uses:** Hiking, cross country skiing, bicycles, horses and horse drawn wagons, snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles.

**Project History:** The County of St. Paul purchased the rail line from CNR in 1993 for \$125,000.00. The County was interested for several reasons, firstly because of a positive gravel resource (a gravel pit) with considerable equity, and secondly because of its recreational potential particularly for equestrian, wagon train and snowmobile use. The County advertised and held public meetings stating that, once an organization was in place that would take responsibility for developing and managing the rail line for multi use recreational purposes, it would be turned over to them. A group of hikers, cross country skiers and snowmobilers approached the County, asking and advising that they would work together as a group to manage the trail. This management group became the Iron Horse Trail Committee, a sub committee of the Elk Point Historical Society.

**Issues:** At the time the County purchased the land there was some resentment from private interests who were interested in acquiring the gravel. Some landowners also wanted to purchase the rail line running through their property. In fact, neither of these possibilities would likely ever have been realized. The CNR disposal procedure for the rail line required first offering it to the Government of Canada, then to the Province, then the County and finally to private landowners. The province had been advised to keep the railway because of the gravel resource. This memo was delayed with the result that the County was allowed to purchase the rail line.

# **The Iron Horse Trail**

## **Methodology**

A questionnaire was developed and delivered over three days of interviewing eleven families randomly selected from various points along the length of the Trail. Some consideration was given to contacting those landowners with greatest exposure along the Trail, but ultimately availability (harvest time; employment away from the farm) was the determining factor in whether some of the chosen contacts were interviewed. It is generally noted that personal contact is the more effective method of eliciting responses; there is a greater inclination to be suspicious of someone unknown making contact by phone. Also, interview times tended to be longer than foreseen, generally lasting 1-1 1/2 hours, and entailing some amount of 'visiting'.

## **Questionnaire**

Questions were broadly grouped into four categories: level of awareness and participation; issues; expectations and impact of trail; recommendations. Responses were somewhat unexpected. There was a higher level of support for the Trail than anticipated even among those most impacted by the Trail. There were no major issues of serious concern to those interviewed.

## **Level of Awareness and Participation**

All interviewees were aware that the County had purchased and owned the abandoned rail line and planned to develop a trail.

Only two of those interviewed had attended the County's public meetings although several others indicated that they had expressed an interest in purchasing that portion of the rail line passing through or by their property. Only one interviewee felt some continuing annoyance and concern at not having been successful in acquiring ownership of the abandoned right of way.

Almost all interviewees indicated that they had not attended the meetings because they had no issues to raise. Snowmobiles, quads, and other on road vehicles were using the abandoned rail line prior to it being developed as a trail. There were no problems with this usage other than with local urban residents occasionally dumping yard waste along the rail line. This was not serious enough to cause complaints or other actions on the part of those interviewed.

Two of those interviewed were involved in the trail planning and consultation processes. The rest had never been contacted directly by a trail manager, nor were they aware of who the trail managers were other than 'they supposed the County was involved and had some responsibility'. Trail managers are identified on signage at trail access points. While one interviewee (involved in planning and building the trail) had a reason to contact the trail manager and did so, the rest were unaware of whether the trail managers responded promptly and appropriately to complaints. Most of them indicated that if they ever did have a problem they would contact the

County first. One landowner indicated that the County had responded promptly when an oil company placed a Texas gate across the Trail. The County had the gate removed immediately so that horses could get across.

A few people indicated that they were aware that a higher level of trail management was happening now than there had been in the past and that new signage and facilities were beginning to go in along the Trail. They had noted "things were happening out on the Trail".

## **Issues**

Interviewees were asked specifically about concerns they might have with the following: liability, injury, dogs, vandalism, policing, garbage, noise, loss of privacy, theft, trespassing, fire, fencing, and ongoing trail maintenance.

All but one were somewhat surprised at the question stating that they did not have, nor had they ever been given, any reason to have concerns. However after considering the question, approximately 30% said they had noticed garbage dumped along the trail at times. This problem was not associated with trail users, but with the habits of a few local residents. Interviewees identified the real problem as motorized highway vehicle access to the Trail. They all felt this should be prevented. At the same time they felt that they, as adjacent landowners, should be able to drive their own vehicles on the trail whether it be for fence maintenance, cattle management, picking berries and mushrooms or hunting. One of them mentioned that since they put up with snowmobiles going by, there should be some benefits to the landowner. Trail signage prohibits access by unauthorized highway vehicles and indicates that violators will receive a \$500 fine.

None of those interviewed regarded trail maintenance as a costly issue although they recognized there would be costs involved. They did identify several problem areas along the Trail where remedies could involve significant cost. Two interviewees are regular trail users and are very involved in ongoing trail maintenance and development. A few others mentioned clearing the trail of deadfall and doing other minor work and cleanup as they saw the need. In general however, most interviewees were not particularly involved with the trail. They used it infrequently for recreational or cattle management purposes.

Fencing is not an issue along much of the trail. While those interviewed had no concerns, they did make reference to several other landowners for whom it may have been an issue at one time. Reasonably priced gates were made available for purchase by the landowner. The County installed them free of charge.

## **Expectations and Impact of the Trail**

No one had experienced negative impacts from the trail (in general it had little or no impact of any kind). All agreed that 95% of trail users were from the local area. For this purpose, 'local' included the greater area (St. Paul and possibly even Bonnyville and Smoky Lake).

They felt the trail benefited the community, especially urban residents with snowmobiles and quads. They also felt that the Trail had helped solve problems, particularly that of snowmobilers racing in town and cutting rural fences. Several expressed support of the Trail for the economic benefits it could bring to the community. They hoped to personally capitalize on those opportunities (a snowmobile rally the previous winter had brought more than \$200,000.00 into St. Paul in one weekend). There was general intrigue and support of the possibility that the Iron Horse Trail might become part of the Trans Canada Trail.

Where young people were present, they indicated higher levels of interest and support for the Trail than did their parents.

All respondents use or have used the Trail for recreational purposes at some time (horses, wagons, berry picking, gathering mushrooms, picnicking, snowmobiles). One interviewee volunteers to take local disabled people and school groups for wagon rides along the trail.

All interviewees felt that trail usage could increase 45-100% with little or no negative impact and were supportive of increased use and trail promotion. At the same time suggestions were made for implementing controls including: possible speed limits for quads and snowmobiles, especially in areas where houses and children are close to the Trail; prohibiting the use of "stingers" (noise enhancers) on snowmobiles.

Several people suggested that increased use might create the need for a green belt to ensure privacy where the Trail passed very close to homes.

Trail managers do not notify adjacent landowners of special events that will cause increased Trail traffic (snowmobile rallies). Landowners might hear of such events through the local paper.

## **Recommendations**

Interviewees were asked what advice they would give to future trail managers contemplating the development of trails, and to landowners living along potential routes. They were also asked if they considered themselves to be Trail supporters.

All interviewees placed themselves somewhere between neutral to positive in support of the Trail with approximately 75% being definitely supportive of the Trail. Landowners were direct in their comments and eager to provide input on this question. Recommendations are included below.

Prevent unauthorized vehicle access to the Trail while preserving historic adjacent landowner uses (access to fields, cattle movement and grazing, recreational access).

Implement proper grading, removal of large gravel and stabilization of sandy areas so that hikers, bicyclists and horses can better access the Trail. It was noted that weeds and gravel deter walking and the large gravel is unsuited to horses. They felt proper weed control was important.

Create designated areas for bonfires (one fire pit was put in this summer).

Construct toilets and rest areas (one rest stop was put in this summer; others are being planned).

Put in wells or otherwise create a water supply.

Uncontrolled use by quads (especially at nighttime) would not be acceptable. Access times need to be controlled.

Signage is important (Stay on the trail, Speed limit signs). Stop signs at trail access points are very important. 'No unauthorized highway vehicle' signs are having some effect, but trucks and 4x4's still go down the Trail and can do real damage. They create unforeseen hazards for other users. Two such vehicles cannot pass each other on the Trail.

There is little contact with trail managers. Adjacent owners would like to be in closer contact.

Proper management and controls are important. User respect is key.

Night hunting is dangerous and shouldn't be allowed.

When choosing someone to promote trails, "It's important not to bring in someone in a suit who gathers everyone together and tells them how wonderful it will be to have a trail go by their house. It needs to be grass roots effort". Find local people who are supportive of the trail and let them be the ringleaders.

Work on building trust and long-term relationships.

Trail users need to know the trail is their privilege. Stay on the trail; don't harass animals; close gates and pick up all garbage.

If someone trespasses, farm owners should not be liable.

It's important to maintain access across trail for watering cattle.

Communicate positive benefits. Find good positive people who can do this. Make sure people attending meetings have lots of printed information to take home with them. Make sure printed materials get home to the women. Visit people.

When snowmobiles use the trail it needs regular maintenance; moguls are dangerous.

You need something separating you from the trail. You need some sense of privacy and protection from noise.

Be up front in your communications with landowners. Landowner contact and consultation are extremely important.

## **The Iron Horse Trail – A Summary**

"We had fresh spirited horses under us, a cloudless sky and bright sun above; and an atmosphere exhilarating as some pure gentle stimulant. The country was of varied beauty; rich in soil, grasses, flowers, wood, and water; infinitely diversified in colour and outline."

From "Ocean to Ocean", Sanford Fleming's Expedition through Canada in 1872. Being a Diary Kept During a Journey from the Atlantic to the Pacific by George M. Grant, Secretary to the Expedition pub. 1863. Facsimile edition reprinted by Coles Pub. Co., Toronto, 1979.

Reverend George M. Grant wrote these words over 100 years ago as he traversed the historic Carlton trail where Frog, Middle and Moosehill Creeks run into the North Saskatchewan River 225 kilometres east of Edmonton.

When the CNR abandoned a portion of local rail line, the County of St. Paul seized the chance to acquire resources of considerable potential benefit to County residents. The first was a rich gravel resource; the second was the opportunity to develop a linear recreational park for use by wagon trains, equestrians, hikers, snowmobilers, and other recreationists. However it took the combined vision and commitment of both the County and local citizens, the Elk Point Historical Society and the Iron Horse Trail Committee, to turn this opportunity into an actively managed multi use public recreational trail benefiting citizens and visitors to the Elk Point area.

Today the Iron Horse Trail follows the abandoned Canadian National Railway right of way for 34 kilometres between Elk Point and Heinsburg and modern day 'trekkers' are discovering the truth in these historic words. The Trail parallels the route of the historic Carlton Trail and gives trail users easy access to public sites celebrating the colourful history and culture of the region. The journey of discovery first begun by natives, explorers, fur traders, missionaries, North West Mounted Police, and the many settlers who made their way west along this ancient corridor shaped by melting glaciers, is continued today by those traveling the Iron Horse Trail.

Trails are living things, shaped by their environment, usage, and the needs of those living along them. With involvement and support from County representatives, trail managers, users, and the rural and urban residents of the area, new facilities are being developed to support the Iron Horse Trail and the communities living along it. Critical to this process is support from the rural landowners through and past whose lands the Trail passes. Many rural residents see the Iron Horse Trail as an opportunity, solving historical problems associated with uncontrolled recreational access in rural areas, creating new economic benefits within the community, and educating Albertans in the rich history and natural beauty of the area. They made the following comments about their experience of living along the trail.

"People in town need places to use their snow machines-designated trails are good places to do this. Every one needs some place to go."

"If kids are on the Trail, aren't they a lot better off than running around town in cars? It's a family affair-the kids are supervised because the parents are along. This is a public trail for people who use it properly."

"It's so nice to get out on the Trail and be in the quiet and wild, especially for town people."  
"Noise? You can hear the snowmobiles or quads, but it's no worse than traffic on the road. We've never had a trespasser. I'm glad they made the Trail"

"I watch my end of it and check it to make sure there are no logs, that it's safe. I do have an interest in it. I am a trail supporter"

"With people traipsing around, it's nice that people have some place to go and traipse"  
On the possibility of the Iron Horse Trail eventually being incorporated as part of the Trans Canada Trail "I think it's a great idea. It will be a world-class attraction. There will be local pride in the Trans Canada Trail"

"We consider ourselves trail supporters. It's a positive thing, good for everyone to be able to share this experience. It's beautiful."

"Let people have some freedom. They need to have places to go. There will always be problems but it's a good thing to give people access. They share with us so we'll share with them."

"Trail users are pretty much self disciplined. I've never had a problem with vandalism, theft, trespass, stealing diesel, etc."

# **Western Irrigation District Canal Pathway**

## **Western Irrigation District Canal Pathway (the Calgary to Chestermere Lake Trail)**

**Type of Trail:** Active irrigation canal alignment.

**Location:** From Headwalls at the Max Bell Arena, Calgary, east to Chestermere Lake. Trail utilizes what was once an all-weather service road required for long-term maintenance of the WID canal. Trail follows north (left) side of canal; the service road was relocated to south (right) side of canal.

**Historical Perspective:** The Western Headworks Canal, (the WID Canal Pathway uses a small part of its alignment) runs from Calgary to Chestermere to Brooks, Alberta. Built between 1903 and 1906, it was the second largest water diversion project (second only to the Nile) in the world at the time. The canal was refurbished in 1912-1913 and remained essentially unchanged until the early 1990's when it underwent major rehabilitation.

Because of the impacts of the construction and redevelopment process, Alberta Environment talked to each affected landowner one on one and open houses were held in Calgary and the M.D. of Rocky View. The two held in the M. D. focused on the possibility of developing a multi use pathway as part of the canal rehabilitation process. The canal itself tripled in size and there were significant impacts for adjacent landowners. Industrial landowners were required to clean up their properties; refuse had been allowed to accumulate in the canal corridor. Additional lands were purchased or acquired through land swaps. Alberta Environment cancelled all existing lease arrangements. Once construction was completed, land surplus to the rehabilitation was re-leased back to the adjacent landowners. Government standard four strand barbed wire fences were installed in rural areas and cattle no longer had direct access to the canal. The government installed pump wells for farmers (watering cattle and irrigation) at a cost of \$30,000-\$40,000 each. Since Alberta Environment intended to fence the right of way anyway, installing fences for the landowners did not represent an extra cost to them.

The Project raised controversy and considerable opposition. Reticence and skepticism on everyone's part jeopardized the trail from the start. Landowner concerns were not the only issue. Divisive maintenance, jurisdictional, signage and management issues also had to be worked out. One outcome of the effort and vision expended on the Project was its reception of an award for heritage development, the first time a government organization has received such an award. The second is the general acceptance and support rural adjacent landowners now give to the Western Irrigation District Canal Pathway. The WID Canal Pathway was opened to the public in stages as segments of it were completed. By 1994 the public had access to the entire length of the trail from Calgary to Chestermere.

**Terrain:** Trail follows the canal passing from residential parkland, through eastern Calgary's densely trafficked roadway and industrial areas, to rural areas that are diminishing rapidly under increasing pressure from urban development. Trail ends at Chestermere Lake.

**Access:** Broad (3 metre), level, asphalt pathway. Interconnected access points from the Bow River Pathway system to the WID trail include the Deerfoot Trail ped/cycle overpass bridge at Max Bell Arena (official), Blackfoot Trail/17 Ave. bridge at Bow Water Canoe Club (official), Ogden Road at 50 Ave. S.E., Glenmore Trail/Ogden Road S.E. at the Glenmore Inn and

Shopping Centre parking lot. There is also access at the Town of Chestermere (official) and one at 84th Street that is illegal. A gravel road used for canal access and maintenance purposes runs along the right (south) side of the canal. As on the paved side, no unauthorized vehicles are permitted.

**Signage:** Adequate trail signage in place at all access points.

**Facilities:** At the request of adjacent rural landowners, there are no parking facilities except at those official points noted above. Landowners feared the Trail would bring unwanted elements from the City and did not want to encourage this. While the Trail can also be accessed at a number of road crossings in the rural area, passing traffic makes stopping on the road dangerous. There are few public facilities along the Trail except those available at public places in the urban area. Adjacent landowners indicated that they would now like to see rest (toilet, picnic benches and tables) facilities put in place in the rural area. Trail managers see toilet facilities as high maintenance items with associated costs.

**Points of Interest:** There are several major wetlands along the Trail that provide opportunities for watching birds and other wildlife. One is located between Glenmore and 100 Street S.E. near the Heatherglen Golf Course and the second is at 116 Street and 50 Avenue. Interpretive signage is located along the Trail. Landscaping includes reintroduced native grasses and wildflowers (land managers wanted to restore the land as close to native condition as possible). The award winning Western Irrigation District Headworks Interpretive Site is located on the south side of the river where the Headworks diverts water from the Bow River to the WID Canal. This is a heritage site that combines new and old site elements.

**Trail Manager:** Alberta Environment owns and manages the Trail and does all structural maintenance. They have access and maintenance agreements with the City of Calgary, the M.D. of Rocky View, and the Town of Chestermere who have responsibility for weed control, grass cutting and garbage where the Trail passes through their respective areas. The City, M.D. and Town mow one metre on either side of the paved trail. The Trail is not patrolled regularly. Problems, if any, are reported by landowners or trail users. Alberta Environment was not prepared to spend a lot of extra money beyond that already budgeted for fences, access, etc. Their agreement to proceed with trail development was conditional on the willingness of the City of Calgary, M.D. of Rocky View, and the Town of Chestermere to assist with maintenance of the Trail. In some areas adjacent landowners have taken on, through agreements with their local authority, maintenance of that part of the Trail passing through their land.

**Length:** 26 kilometres (15 miles)

**Surface:** Asphalt

**Width of Trail:** 3-3.5 metres.

**Permitted Uses:** Hiking (pedestrian), cross-country skiing, in-line skating, cycling.

**Project History:** This Trail was developed as an add-on to the WID Canal rehabilitation project, evolving from an all-weather service road into a public access corridor. Alberta Environment had to build a new graveled access when they redeveloped the canal. The City of Calgary approached them and asked that they pave the road for addition to the city's bike path system. Although first envisioned as a link for Calgary's downtown bike trails, extension to Chestermere Lake evolved 'naturally' at the request of the Town of Chestermere once the trail reached city limits. Alberta Environment talked to the M.D. of Rocky View who was also supportive and assisted with the public consultation process. The concept was promoted within the government as part of a "multi purpose" approach the Department was promoting for their water resource projects.

**Issues:** Loss of pasture (loss of leased land, etc.). Alberta Environment either purchased or swapped land to compensate landowners. This did not satisfy all parties and was likely the most sensitive issue related to the canal redevelopment.

Initial trail concerns included loss of privacy, vandalism, trespass, garbage, theft, and noise - interviewees reported that none of these concerns had materialized. Landowners especially feared unwanted 'city' elements and bush parties. In fact, the Trail has solved snowmobile and other problems. Landowners have found the Trail to be a family environment, a multi purpose water corridor, resulting in reduced vandalism and crime.

## **Western Irrigation District Canal Pathway**

### **Methodology**

A questionnaire was delivered over two days of interviewing seven families randomly selected from the rural area through which the trail passes. All of those interviewed had homes or buildings located directly beside the trail and could be expected to be among those most impacted by activities associated with trail use. Two interviewees operated tree farms or nurseries, one had cattle only, several had mixed farms and the others had acreages or hobby farms. In addition, information was gathered from the Western Irrigation District project manager, and landscape consultants for the rehabilitation project.

Information on industrial issues was gathered through contacts with Alberta Environment. Government consultation to industrial landowners on the Canal Pathway followed a less formal process than that employed with rural landowners. This was primarily due to the fact that long-term land use relationships and dialogue already existed between Alberta Environment and these industrial landowners.

### **Questionnaire**

Questions were broadly grouped into four categories: level of awareness and participation; issues; expectations and impact of the trail; recommendations. There was a high level of support for the trail, even among those interviewees who had initially opposed it.

Note should be taken that although this is described as a rural trail, in fact this is an area in transition undergoing considerable urban and industrial impacts. Roads, railway, canal, pipelines and various other oil and gas activities bisect the rural area. Traditional farming is disappearing to development and other interests. This area is still designated as 'green belt' to the frustration of some landowners who are hoping to sell their land to developers. Development potential and interest is limited by industrial, oil and gas, etc. impacts that degrade the area's appearance and living environment. In spite of all this, the trail itself retains a peaceful natural character in the rural areas.

### **Level of Awareness and Participation**

All interviewees were aware of the identities of canal and trail managers. They had been informed from the beginning of plans to rehabilitate the canal and develop a multi use pathway as part of that redesign. Almost all interviewees (several were not living there at the time) were involved in the public consultation process, some of them more so than others. All of them agreed that they were as involved as they wanted to be. Many of them raised concerns at that time. One landowner who was not initially involved in the public meetings, (he had no concerns and is a strong trail proponent) became involved when he realized there was a possibility the trail project might not go ahead. Landscape architects reported that many of the concerns raised by rural landowners were addressed or answered by other more positive landowners. This made their job much easier. Many of those interviewed appear to keep in occasional contact with trail

managers and several of them have been in contact with Alberta Environment regarding operational concerns (dogs off leash, equestrian usage, weed control, parking) related to the trail. Their concerns have been addressed promptly and to landowner satisfaction. All interviewees were aware of rural opposition to the Trans Canada Trail and had just read an article about this in their weekly newspaper a day or so before they were interviewed. They were following this with interest although none of them supported the article's anti-trail point of view.

## Issues

Interviewees were asked specifically about concerns they might have with the following: liability, dogs, permitted uses, vandalism, policing, garbage, noise, loss of privacy, theft, trespassing, fire, fencing, and ongoing trail maintenance.

Landowners had raised a similar suite of concerns during the public consultation process. Their concerns were accommodated through various strategies. All of those interviewed expressed surprise at the extent to which expected problems have not materialized.

In addition, rural landowners wanted the landscape to remain natural with no introduction of invasive grasses. The subdivision at Chestermere wanted a more manicured look suggesting that short grass would reduce insect problems near their homes. This wish wasn't accommodated at the time. In spite of a poor looking result, these residents mow the native grasses that were planted (the M.D. turns a blind eye). The landscape architect mentioned that in retrospect they would have accommodated this concern and done some transitional planting.

**Liability and Fencing:** Land is government owned and insured. Chain link fence was installed at the request of industrial landowners concerned for the security of buildings and equipment. Where the railway follows the Canal Pathway, chain link fence separates the two (this was done at the request of the City of Calgary).

There are no fences separating the trail from the canal. Although water levels are low in the winter, the canal is full during the summer. When this was raised with Alberta Environment as a potential hazard, especially considering the allure water has for young children, they acknowledged the concern. Most young children using the trail are in the company of adults. There have been no problems and the trail is considered quite safe. The trail is well signed and includes signage stating, "Use at your own risk." If someone is ever hurt, they expect that there would be legal actions.

Heatherglen Golf Course has recently expanded across the canal with the result that golf balls occasionally land on the trail. Trail users have raised concerns about the possibility of being hit and would like high fences installed in that area. Alberta Environment has discussed this with Heatherglen and is monitoring the situation. The golf course has placed warning signs and is hoping these will be sufficient. If fencing is required, Heatherglen will be responsible for all costs. Landowners did not seem to have particular concerns about liability, probably because they have not had any problems with trespassers. One said however that courts are "far too liberal in terms of what they consider a liability".

Several landowners had existing fencing they paid for themselves; they needed eight foot fencing to keep deer out of their tree farms and nurseries. Another wanted a chain link fence to provide

extra protection to his livestock (his barns are directly beside the trail). He installed his own fence just inside fencing installed by the government.

**Dogs:** There are many dogs on the trail. Several people mentioned that there can be problems, especially with dogs that aren't used to being around cattle. One landowner reported an incident between a dog and his cattle. The dog was leashed but got away from its owner (in line skater). Six cattle experienced injuries (he believed that one cow had subsequently died from shock related symptoms). Although the incident was reported to the M.D., no action was taken against the dog owner. The landowner did not fully appreciate the extent of the injuries at the time of the incident and did not get the dog owner's name. Trail signage requires that dogs be leashed, however one interviewee indicated that people sometimes drive out with 2 or 3 dogs and let them run loose on the trail for exercise. A more common concern was the failure of dog owners to clean up after their animals, spoiling the trail for other users.

**Permitted Uses:** Permitted uses include cycling, hiking, in line skating, and cross-country skiing (not much snow).

Uncontrolled snowmobile use had been a problem on the canal prior to its redevelopment. Some users parked their machines under bridges, went for drinks and then rode along the canal until two or three in the morning, "flashing their lights on the houses as they drove by". Others used the canal banks as a jump for their machines. Snow machines are not permitted on the trail (trail is posted: "No unauthorized motorized vehicles"). Access controls are in place. Snowmobiles still use the canal on occasion however interviewees stated that the trail and canal redevelopment have solved all snowmobile problems. One person commented that snowmobiles make the canal surface unsuitable for skating. (The canal is less 'interesting' to snowmobile users now than it once was. It had reverted to a natural state with vegetation, curves, etc. Now it is fairly straight with no vegetation.) One dog sledder has also been seen using the canal.

The old graveled access road along the canal was used as a bridle path prior to redevelopment. Horses were originally permitted on the trail. Adjacent landowners complained that horse owners were not cleaning up after their animals and that horses were damaging the trail areas next to the paved pathway. Horses are no longer permitted on the trail and it is signed accordingly. Wildlife areas are signed "No Hunting".

**Vandalism, Policing, Theft, Noise, Trespassing:** Although these were raised as initial concerns, there have been no problems and they are no longer regarded as issues.

There are no regular trail patrols except those done for maintenance purposes. Any problems or policing concerns are reported by adjacent landowners and trail users (there have been no criminal matters). Trail managers address any concerns promptly. Adjacent landowners indicate a high level of confidence in this relationship.

Fearing the trail would bring unwanted elements from the City (bush parties, theft), adjacent rural landowners requested that parking areas not be provided. While these concerns have proven unjustified, the lack of parking at rural access points is considered hazardous and interviewees indicated that 'people have to park somewhere'. One interviewee commented on children running across the main road from parked cars. "It's very dangerous. Sooner or later there will be an accident."

Interviewees reported that while there were problems with trespassing, partying, etc. before the trail went in, there have been no problems since. Prior to the trail, paths and access roads were

neglected. Prevention of motorized vehicle access along the canal and good maintenance and signage are viewed as significant solution factors.

**Loss of Privacy:** Most interviewees had dwellings located directly beside the trail. Berming, natural planting (low maintenance), fencing and other landscape design elements were used to address these concerns. Even those living closest to the trail had no concerns about noise. One person recommended that even where fencing wasn't required (cattle), if it helped solve a landowner's concern about a trail or helped prevent a specific problem, it might be worthwhile building one. He went on to suggest that the closer a house to a trail, the greater the need to consider a greater bumper area (whether by relocating that portion of the trail or through other methods).

**Garbage, Ongoing Trail Maintenance, Fire:** Landowners expressed amazement that garbage is not an issue. Trail users pick up after themselves. Landowners are willing to pick up occasional waste and do other trail maintenance but seldom have occasion to do so. The City of Calgary, M.D. of Rocky View and Town of Chestermere are responsible for garbage collection and grass cutting. Prisoners in 'blazing red coveralls' do clean up during the summer. Landowners along the canal raised initial concerns about trail users throwing garbage into the canal that could get into their pump wells, damaging their equipment. This has not occurred and trail managers mentioned it would be less of a concern here than further along the canal where water use is heavier. They also mentioned that plastic bags for instance, are easily airborne, and any problems with this kind of garbage clogging pumps may not be related to trail use at all. When an unidentified spill in the canal was reported, the fire department promptly installed booms and identified the source as a slough that had overflowed.

Several individuals mentioned concerns with the scheduling of grass/weed cutting. While they regard the trail as generally well maintained, one person felt they (the M.D.) were late on weed spraying, waiting until weeds had gone to seed before they were dealt with. Another said the one metre strip mowed on either side of the trail is insufficient, "long adjacent grass is a fire hazard". Still another (a nurseryman) said, "It's a natural trail, leave it alone. Mowing weeds isn't necessary. There are better ways to spend money and there are some very nice flowers out there." Landowners are responsible for maintenance of their fences.

### **Expectations and Impact of the Trail**

Apart from the loss of leased land and other land base impacts, none of those interviewed have experienced negative impacts from the trail itself (in general it has little or no impact of any kind). Most trail users are from Calgary or Chestermere, using the trail for recreational or commuting purposes.

Landowners felt that the trail is a benefit to the community, has helped solve problems, and adds positive value to their property. Most of them have little interest in operating trail-based businesses, although one woman may be interested in opening a small stand in the summertime. About 30% of them use the trail for recreational purposes; all of them (or their families) have used the trail at some time. One farmer rides his bike down the trail to service his irrigation

equipment. Referring to some court cases involving stockyards, one person wondered if trail users might some day launch actions against landowners, attempting to limit uses of their land.

Some industrial landowners have requested trail access gates through their fences (some of their employees commute). Reasonable requests are accommodated. Trail managers expressed concern that larger numbers of individual home or acreage owners may request gates in the future. Costs may make this unfeasible, however they are willing to provide community access as requested. Gates were provided to those landowners requesting them for cattle management or other purposes.

Interviewees were supportive of increased use and promotion of the trail. One commented that the trail would be used more heavily were it not for the fact that Calgary's east side is primarily industrial in this area. Highest usage occurs at the beginning of the season on nice weekend days when there may be 300-400 people on the trail. If it is hot, there may be no one. Average number on a weekday might be 20-30 people. No official numbers are recorded.

One rural landowner mentioned that an irrigation ditch is a special case; landowners don't pay their fair share of water use, operation costs and maintenance. He believes that the public should be able to share in what they are paying for.

## **Recommendations**

Interviewees were asked what advice they would give to future trail managers contemplating the development of trails. They were also asked if they considered themselves trail supporters. All interviewees regarded themselves as trail supporters. Recommendations included the following:

### **Landowner**

Put in parking areas.

Create several rest areas (toilets, picnic tables and benches). The right facilities need to be available. Build them out of cement so they won't be destroyed.

Trail should be built properly and must be accessible to as many users as possible.

Would have problems with horse and snowmobile use on narrow (3 metre) trails like this one. Quads mean motorbikes and then massive conflict with pedestrians.

Landowner consultation and a well thought out plan are important.

Put people out there on the trail occasionally to talk to people, check the trail and ask people if signage is effective. Do some interpretation.

Once you have approvals, put cotton in your ears and go! Otherwise you get nothing done. In the end that's the only way you get some things accomplished.

We went hiking in Korea where they are very fit. They have fitness stations along the trails where you can do sit ups, etc.

You are correct in consulting. Somehow you have to get message across that the people who use these trails have good intentions and are good people. They can help you in terms of reporting questionable behavior.

### **Trail Manager**

Work with the people. Vandalism is a big initial concern. They are protective and afraid of the unknown. If you tell them something or offer them something, follow through.

### **Landscape Consultant**

It's inevitable that the whole notion meets with opposition. People can't visualize the impacts. You need to put aside the inherent worries (trespass, loss of privacy, noise, garbage, etc.) and deal with the individual concerns. As is always the case, people don't understand later what all the fuss was about. They discover the trail eliminates problems (random access, drinking parties, throwing beer bottles from trucks). Trail users are directed and conscientious and they don't throw garbage or vandalize.

## The Western Irrigation District Canal Pathway – A Summary

On any given day, 20 to 50 people can be seen cycling, walking, running or skiing along the 26 kilometre asphalt pathway which follows the Western Headworks Canal, (its formal name) in its course from the Bow River, Calgary, to Chestermere Lake. These numbers can swell dramatically on spring and summer weekends to 400-500 trail enthusiasts, or decrease to nothing in the sweltering heat of a summer day or the bitter winds of a prairie blizzard. Like the prairie itself, the trail has many aspects, unpredictable but endlessly appealing to those who use it regularly.

The history of the Western Irrigation District (WID) Canal Pathway is linked to that of the Canal itself, which in turn, has its roots in the early settlement of this province. In 1903, the Canadian Pacific Railway received its land grant (an area totaling 3 million acres) in the heart of the Palliser Triangle, the area east and south of Calgary bounded by the Bow and Red Deer Rivers. In return the CPR agreed to develop an irrigation system to bring water to this fertile but arid area. Work was first begun on the Headworks, located in east Calgary, where water from the Bow River was diverted along 26 kilometres of canal to Chestermere Lake. Chestermere, or Reservoir No. 1, is a man made balancing reservoir for the irrigation system that delivers water to 300,000 acres of farmland. But from the very beginning Chestermere Lake meant more than this to the early residents of the area who traveled there to boat, swim and picnic. With Alberta Environment's completion of the canal rehabilitation in 1993 and the opening of the WID Canal Pathway, the outdoor recreation potential of Canal, Lake and Calgary's Bow River Parkway was complete. This new recreational trail facility makes it possible for people to walk, bike or roller blade between these two urban communities enjoying the rural landscape in between.

The WID Canal Pathway is a product of the vision, planning, commitment, and cooperation brought to the project by its sponsors: Alberta Environment, the City of Calgary, the Town of Chestermere, the M.D. of Rocky View and the adjacent landowners who live along the trail. Through historical signage, landscaping with reintroduced native plants and wildflowers, scenic areas with benches and picnic tables, and wildlife viewing areas they have ensured a unique trail experience for the benefit of residents and visitors to the area.

Staunch supporters, many adjacent rural landowners act as the trail's eyes and ears. They said the following about their experience of living along the trail.

"People who use the trail are very neat, very good."

"I like talking to people. I like to meet people on the trail. Some people like to talk, others don't."

"We like to see people enjoying themselves on the trail. 98% of them are nice people."

"I've always felt squeamish about the costs of the canal and not paying properly for it (farmers not paying for the real cost of having water supplied to them). If the public pays (for the canal and the water it supplies), it shouldn't be exclusively for one user."

"You are right in consulting. Somehow you have to get the message across that the people who use these trails have good intentions and are good people. They can help you in terms of seeing and reporting questionable behavior."

(Referring to the presence of the trail) "It doesn't affect us. It's nice to look out and see people walking along."

"It benefits the communities and is an asset."

"It cost money to put in this trail. It's a good product, good drainage. Now there's not much involved in the trail's ongoing maintenance and operation."

"It's a wonderful recreation idea. More cost effective than other recreational facilities."

"I think they are an asset to property values."

"We went through a process of consultation about this trail. Lots of people had concerns about cattle, trespass, etc. We had some of those things prior to, but never after, the trail." "People used to party and camp in the slough areas before. Now, there are no problems."

"Lots of people are using the trail-we've had no problems-it's a real asset to the neighbourhood and the people using it have never caused problems. Most are very friendly."

"It has to be built properly and must be accessible to as many users as possible."

"Great for all Canadians and the tourism industry from abroad."

"99% of people on the trail are very, very good."

"Thought it would be worse, but lots of decent people - they stop to talk sometimes."

"Garbage? They've been pretty good. There are some really conscientious people in the world. The seniors come out."

"They (trails) are a good thing to have. This is the most beautiful country in the world."