

For Immediate Release
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REPORT RECOMMENDS HOW TO ADDRESS RECREATION ISSUES AT KOOCANUSA

Recreation use must balance economic value, ecological integrity and health and safety concerns

(Columbia Basin) – A new report aims to reduce some of the issues that have arisen around Koochanusa Reservoir due to increased tourism and recreation on Crown land. These issues include degradation of sensitive grasslands and wildlife habitat, impacts on cultural areas, excessive litter and garbage in the backcountry and public health and safety concerns.

The Koochanusa area is a regionally important tourism and recreation asset, attracting outdoor enthusiasts for activities that range from wildlife viewing to off-road vehicle use. It is also an area of traditional First Nations use and falls within the territory of the Ktunaxa Nation.

In 2014, MLA Bill Bennett and Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, initiated the Koochanusa Recreation Steering Committee (KRSC) to help address issues around the reservoir. The group includes representatives from the BC government, Ktunaxa National Council, Tobacco Plains Indian Band, Regional District of East Kootenay and Columbia Basin Trust. It commissioned the [*Koochanusa Area Situational Analysis*](#), which recommends how to support recreation on Crown land while maintaining the economic value, ecological integrity and aesthetic appeal of the area for current and future users.

“Constituents in this area have identified long-standing issues,” said Bill Bennett, MLA for Kootenay East. “That’s why I brought this group of agencies together to explore how we can effectively maintain important tourism and recreation opportunities in the area while reducing some of the negative impacts.”

To help identify issues and potential solutions, in summer 2014 consultants engaged with First Nations, government, residents, property owners, visitors, local businesses and non-governmental and community organizations. They also looked at existing management plans for the area, including the *Cranbrook West Recreation Management Strategy*, completed in 2005.

“The Trust is pleased to be able to facilitate and convene this group around this important issue,” said Neil Muth, Columbia Basin Trust President and CEO. “By partnering and commissioning this report, we can now help identify actions to ensure the lands around the reservoir are appropriately maintained for all.”

Over the coming months, KRSC will begin implementing the recommendations. The priority is to educate recreational users about appropriate behaviour and stewardship; this includes creating a recreation code of conduct, a brochure and website for the Koochanusa area and signage at popular recreation sites. It may also mean providing more support to Natural Resource Officers. The group also plans to explore partnerships with existing recreational groups in the region and enhance waste management facilities.

For more information and to read the report, visit kooanusarecreation.ca or contact one of the following:

- Hon. Bill Bennett, Kootenay East MLA: Bill.Bennett.MLA@leg.bc.ca
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-30-

PHOTO: Report recommends how to address recreation issues at Kooanusaa.

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